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Rogues Rampant

By Howard Fitzalan

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Tremendous happenings are not infrequently brought to nothing by a trifling accident. A tiny flaw in a piece of steel may wreck the Brooklyn Bridge; crossed telephone wires may be instrumental in the ultimate foiling of a gigantic plot. In this absorbing story Howard Fitzalan tells how the color of an automobile figured in a matter of life and death, when the mere possession of an ebony letter case threatened disaster to more than one innocent person.

CHAPTER I.

CROSSED WIRES.

OUTSIDE there was mistiness, murkiness, with a few street lamps throwing greasy yellow flames athwart the fog bank; footsteps on the pavements muffled in the sound-deadening atmosphere; the rolling of cabs and carriages breaking the silence only after the manner of hoop-trundling; and a fine rain sifting through the treetops with gurgling, sobbing winds to blow it in the faces of passers-by.

The time was something after nine o'clock—not much after, for Redmayne remembered that his appointment with Caspar was for nine-thirty. He had dined alone in his chambers, with his dumb servant to serve; therefore there was silence save when Redmayne requested the passing of condiments—and but little of that—for Diogenes was anticipatory, even to a certain extent possessed of the gift of mind reading.

This Diogenes was a freak of Redmayne's, and so called by another whim He had found him conducting a very small lunch counter in New York; and making little by it, save good will from those gastronomically keen. A tiny little hole in the wall, with a scrupulously clean bar running the length of it, and covered with all manner of cold edibles. One entered, ate what one chose, and summed up the result for Diogenes in coin. Diogenes conducted the place alone, unaided, keeping no check upon his customers. But his counter was not frequented by those trained in schools where the honor system was observed; and Diogenes failed of prospering. Redmayne had dropped into the place quite by accident one day. Then it was new and flourishing. After a lapse of several months, he had again found himself in New York and looked up Diogenes. The place was shuttered, and Redmayne knocked. A sad and melancholy Diogenes, interrupted in the packing of his few effects, came down, hoping his visitor to be other than a tax collector.

They communicated, Diogenes writ-

ing. Redmayne remembered the cooking of the honor-system man and his own need for a body servant. So Diogenes was elected by his unanimous vote, and taken into service at as much as Redmayne deemed his services to be worth—a high price indeed for a servant, but cheap for the money when one considered that Diogenes was in possession of the faculty of cooking as angels should cook, and that he knew the proper place at the shoulder seam to apply the hot iron when pressing a coat.

The name was Redmayne's own. If his servant had any other, Redmayne had forgotten it. The inference as to the name lay in the honor system at the cook shop.

Diogenes had left the room, and Redmayne had been striding between fireplace and window, thinking the evening a very dull one indeed. He might have gone to the club; but then he had promised to wait here for Caspar. Together they were to go to the Mallinfleur reception, that great reception which Washington had been anticipating since the painters, builders and decorators had vacated the Dupont Circle grounds and left the great new house finished and adorned. This was the formal opening of Mallinfleur Mansions, as Mallinfleur *mère* had the bad taste to call them.

Caspar von Zuehohn was a diplomat, and Redmayne was his friend. In fact, Redmayne came to Mallinfleur Mansions as the friend of Caspar. Therefore Redmayne waited and in his impatience twice kicked off his pumps and put them on again. He was trying to decide whether or not a pair of pumps so easily kicked off really fitted him, when the little Sèvres clock on his mantel chimed out a golden note.

"Half past nine," he said, arising from his seat before the fire. "Hang it! Caspar's always late for his appointments."

He sat down, staring into the fire. He was all alert for the coming of his friend, for at Mallinfleur Mansions he would be presented to one whom he had vainly endeavored to meet since the day he had caught sight of her in a fur shop on F Street. The furrier had known her name—oh, yes, perfectly well! Miss Carr—Miss Anne Chilton Carr. But one does not obtain presentations to Misses Carr from furriers; one can only look and admire and wish their mutual acquaintance was not a shopman who sold her things.

Redmayne stared hard at the fire.

He was young, this Redmayne, with more money than he really needed, and a name as old as the Domesday Book. Normally his eyes and mouth were quite pleasant, and he had a certain cheerful alacrity of movement. He was beautifully groomed, and his light hair lay smoothly about his well-shaped head. There was nothing of the remarkable or abnormal about him. One would have lost sight of him in a ballroom where the invitations were select; for he was very much like a great many other young men of his class—clean-minded, athletic, with neither too much brains or too little. He had served as a trooper in Cuba during the war, had filibustered for a lark about Central America, and had gone big-game shooting in the Congo region. Before that he had taken his A. B. at an American university, and his Ph. D. at a German one. So that his life—he was only twenty-seven—had been a tolerably busy one, for all that he was quite wealthy in his own right, with no relatives to point his way.

He strode back to the clock, and found the minute hand nearing the quarter hour.

"Con*found* Caspar!" he said, and went to call his friend on the telephone.

"His clock must have stopped," he muttered, as he took down the telephone receiver. Almost instantly words buzzed into his ears—a woman's voice.

He will never be able to explain just why it was that he listened. He is inclined to believe it was because he was so thoroughly taken by surprise that he had no time to think of what he should do. It occurred to him, it is true, that he might speak

and—probably cause them intense embarrassment. Indeed, that was the reason why he was afraid to put the telephone receiver back on the hook—for fear of disturbing them. He realized that he had intruded upon a private conversation, and his ears flamed crimson.

As he stood, more or less dumfounded, he caught fragments of what they were saying.

"And you insist on my breaking with them at once?" The tone was appealing.

The man's voice that answered was hard and inflexible. "I most certainly do insist. If you cared for me as you say you do, you wouldn't raise the question."

"It's only because I care as I do that I don't want to break with them. They can make our future happiness impossible. I tell you I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what? Don't be ridiculous. What can they do to you?"

"They're not over scrupulous about people's lives—I know that much. And I'm afraid. Don't make me."

"I thought we'd settled that question an hour ago. At any rate, it's settled. I'll see you at the Mallinfleurs, and talk about it further then. But I shan't change my mind. Good-by."

The conversation was closed. Redmayne hung up his receiver and went to stare into the fire again. The woman's tones had been convincing; the man's no less so. Here was a pretty mystery for staid old Washington to have—two people talking over a telephone about penalties and danger and death.

He had grown accustomed, as do most men, to believing that there is but one difference between drama and melodrama—that which eventuates in barbarous communities and has to do with violence and killing is quite the natural thing, and therefore is labeled drama; but the same events occurring in the realms of civilization become unreal, unbelievable, and therefore are called melodrama. It was now suddenly clear to him that something of the sort was perhaps going on in the very block in which he lived; and the mystery of it drove away all thoughts of Caspar, of the Mallinfleurs, and even of Miss Anne Chilton Carr.

He returned to the telephone and lifted the receiver from the hook. There was no sound of talking, and he waited patiently for central to answer him.

"What number, please?"

"Give me information," he said.

Presently the shrill voice of the information clerk announced her presence at the other end of the wire.

"This is Clode, seven-six-eight, M," he informed her. "Will you tell me whether there are any other parties on this line?"

Again he waited, this time for a lengthy space which the information clerk terminated by giving him his answer in a wearied tone:

"Only one——"

"And who is that, please?" he asked eagerly.

"Miss Carnotti—seven-five-eight, K, Clode. Is that all?"

"Yes, thank you."

He rang off, and picked up the telephone book. Turning the pages with moistened finger, he found the one he wanted, and ran his finger rapidly down the page.

Carnotti, Miss Bianca, 1499 I St. N. W.

He shut the book.

"Fourteen ninety-nine I Street," he mused. "No wonder she's on the same line with me."

He walked from his library into his dressing room and thence to his bedroom, the window of which looked out over the back yards of H and I Streets; for these two streets were back to back, a narrow blind alley alone separating the fences.

"Fourteen ninety-nine," he continued to muse. "This is fourteen eighty-seven H, and the numbers run about even on both streets."

He pointed his finger at the different fences gleaming in the sickly gaslights.

"That must be ninety-nine—the little house with the brick wall and box-yew hedges, all screened in from the pub-

lic. Looks as though it might be pretty useful in cases of this sort——"

On his return to the library, his musings vanished; for there stood Caspar, very military and formal in his greatcoat and gold-banded cap. Beneath the coat, Redmayne could see the glittering of gold-frogged uniform and military orders. He shook Caspar's hand quite heartily, and, as his memory reverted to Miss Alice Chilton Carr, he forgot all about Miss Bianca Carnotti.

Once within the great Gothic pile which the Mallinfleurs had erected in Dupont Circle, and after having gone through the ceremony of being effusively pleasant to stout, panting Mrs. Mallinfleur, Redmayne began to search for Miss Anne Chilton Carr, with Caspar at his elbow to aid him. The stone courts and broad stairways, the conservatories and drawing-rooms were crowded to suffocation with a scented crush of women and a lot of frowning men. Through these Redmayne and Caspar pushed, without regard for either frowns or unuttered imprecations, until, in a nook of the court adjoining the breakfast room conservatory, they caught sight of a straight, slim figure in a white lace evening gown. Redmayne was not slow to remember that he had seen just that same poise of the head, just those same lines of brown hair framing a piquant face, in the furrier's shop on F Street.

"There she is!" he whispered excitedly to Caspar, who nodded and came forward with him.

She was in the company of another girl of about her own age—a girl with an exquisite oval face and pale hair, her eyes strangely in contrast, so black were they. Two men were talking to them —a broad-shouldered young naval officer in blue and gold, and a slim, precise man with pointed mustache, a wisp of imperial, and narrow eyes; a Frenchman, to all appearances.

Caspar greeted her with the assured manner of one who had seen her a number of times before.

"My search is rewarded, Miss Carr," he said.

"You won't be audacious enough to say that you were looking for me?" She laughed.

"No—for that would be the truth, and unpardonable in a diplomat. I will say instead that I was in search of the beautiful Southern type of which we of Europe hear so much and see so little."

"I think you're rather horrid to call me typical," she remonstrated, with a mock pout. "Don't you know that every woman considers herself quite original—a type to herself?"

"That was what I made for you—a type for yourself: the beautiful Southern girl."

"That is a slur on my countrywomen, and I shall think of something very ungracious to say about Germans in order to pay you for it. Meanwhile let me——"

She turned to the others, as though about to present them.

"I know Monsieur Yves," explained Caspar, nodding to the owner of the waxed mustache, "and Lieutenant Hardy, too, if he hasn't forgotten that dinner at Hamburg."

"I should say not," said Hardy heartily, and shook hands.

"Let me in turn present Mr. Redmayne, Miss Carr."

They bowed, and Anne gave him her hand. "I have seen you before, Mr. Redmayne."

"In a furrier's shop on F Street," he responded promptly.

She colored slightly. "I should hardly remember you from that," she remarked.

"You must have," he persisted, "since that was the only time I ever saw you."

"But not necessarily the only time I ever saw *you*."

"Quite necessarily," he answered promptly. "It would have been impossible for you to look at me without my knowing and remembering it."

She freed her hand, and stared at him a little.

He did not notice the stare. He was wondering just what it was that made her maddeningly irresistible. Was it the fluffy, silk-like hair through which

the lights shone; or the brown eyes under the heavy brows and lashes; or the color that came and went under her clear olive skin; or the mouth, the upper lip of which curved and showed two little teeth? But these were questions he could not answer. Other women had beautiful eyes, fluffy hair, curving lips. She had charm—a swaying, subtle charm that intoxicated him.

"Let me present Captain von Zuehohn, Miss Carnotti."

It was Anne's voice. She had turned away from him and was speaking to Caspar.

Miss Carnotti!

He looked up. The girl with the pale hair and black eyes was bowing to Caspar. Anne turned again to him.

"Mr. Redmayne—Miss Carnotti."

The girl's eyes met Redmayne's. He had started at the name, and her eyes questioned him, as though she were not wholly at ease. Redmayne said something unimportant, and she replied in kind.

"Carnotti—Carnotti!" he mused, half aloud; then, with the remembrance of the telephone call and the walled house on I Street, "Miss Bianca Carnotti, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered the girl, her tone doubting. "You—you know—my—you have heard of me, Mr. Redmayne?"

He shook his head. "No," he said. "That is—er—yes, you know. Though really I've forgotten where."

Her eyes were a trifle anxious. "Perhaps we have mutual acquaintances, is it?"

She spoke with a lisping foreign burr that was not unattractive. Although Redmayne's eyes and senses were filled with the presence of the other girl, he could not but note in an uninterested way that Bianca Carnotti was possessed of a decided and unique personality. While she gave the impression of a willowy, bending, dependent thing, there was in her eyes an unfathomable something that stood for strength; and that strength was now being exerted to force him to a recollection of how he chanced to remember her name.

"I really cannot say," he insisted, and turned to answer some trifling question of Miss Carr's.

Later they were separated in the crush; and Redmayne found himself alone with Caspar.

"Who is that Carnotti girl?"

Caspar shrugged his shoulders. "Can't say," he responded. "I shouldn't trust her overmuch, though. She's a friend of Yves, and he's one of the Mother Cary's chickens of diplomacy—a bad sort, I should say. I've seen her with Alleyne more or less—'Blacky' Alleyne—short for 'Blackguard.' How the British government ever came to make him an attaché is one of the mysteries of the diplomatic world. And there's Guido Conradi, the Lombard, too. She's one of his cronies. They're a bad lot—just why, I can't tell you. I'm a diplomat, you know."

"She doesn't look that sort."

There was a little scorn in Caspar's voice. "If she did, she would be of no use. Your idea of a dangerous woman seems to be a rouged Jezebel. Let me tell you, Redmayne, that the women to be feared in diplomacy are just such soft-eyed, winning, clinging persons as Bianca Carnotti. Did you ever meet Honora Nugent?"

Redmayne remembered her as a pretty, brown-haired Irish girl, with blue eyes, who had gone about in Washington during the past season. He told Caspar as much.

"But what has she to do with Miss Carnotti?" he added.

"Same type of woman, that's all. One of the best secret agents a country ever had. She served Russia when she was here. She'll serve any country that will give her enough to pay her Viennese modistes and Parisian milliners and London furriers and Brussels jewelers."

"I remember her as most beautifully gowned."

"A queen could not have had more expensive clothes, or in better taste."

"And she was a secret agent?"

Caspar nodded. "One of the very best. She's in London now, they say, in the employ of Japan."

They stopped in one of the alcoves and lighted cigarettes. A lean, slender, small-waisted Englishman, in the dress uniform of a guardsman, lounged by. He was blond, lazy-eyed, and distinctive in his bearing. His cold blue eyes rested on Caspar, and he nodded.

"Alleyne," confided Caspar. " 'Blackguard' Alleyne, as they call him; and that man just joining him, with the birthmark on his lower lip—the man with the splay fingers and beautiful eyes—that's Guido Conradi, the Lombard. Alleyne, Conradi, Yves, and the Carnotti—a combination to make a diplomat run a mile."

"Are they diplomats?"

"Bless you, no! Alleyne is one of the attachés at the British legation—they hate him there like fury, and the ambassador would give his eyes to get rid of him. Guido Conradi calls himself a newspaper correspondent for a paper in Rome, but I don't think he draws any salary for such services. Yves makes no pretense. He says simply that he is compiling a book on American affairs, while Blanche Carnotti—well, she is here, that's all!"

They had tossed their cigarettes away, and were making their way to the ballroom when, in a little alcove, they ran into the blond Alleyne in conversation with Bianca Carnotti. The girl's cheeks were flushed, her eyes downcast. Alleyne's countenance was without mobility.

Redmayne and Caspar passed on.

"Division of the spoils, I fancy," said Caspar dryly.

"But I don't understand!" protested Redmayne. "Spoils—what spoils—and how?"

"My dear boy," said Caspar, with a tolerant smile, "to tell you that would be to explain the devious workings of underground diplomacy. There are such things as documents to be—er—acquired; men and women to be detained or—er—put out of the way; and other things——" His tone changed. "My *dear* madame!"

He was speaking to an elderly dowager in black lace and diamonds. Redmayne, noting his preoccupation, slipped away. He had caught sight of Anne on the arm of another diplomat, as indicated by the latter's broad red ribbon. He pursued her, only to find that she had vanished from sight in some one of the smaller conservatories. He swore silently, and became monosyllabic with those who greeted him.

But, in truth, he had no reason to be jealous; for Anne had relinquished the diplomat's arm, in response to the urgent tugging of Bianca Carnotti. Anne looked down, understood that Bianca wished to say something in private, and sidled unobtrusively after her to the very corner where Bianca had conversed with Alleyne.

"Listen!" said Bianca. "I have something terribly important that I must tell you—I must tell you, and must see you. Will you come, after the reception, to my house?"

She whispered the number on I Street.

Anne's amazement showed plainly in her eyes, but no more plainly than the intensity in those of Miss Carnotti. The girl was pale and shivering, in spite of the heat of the place.

"I do not understand," murmured Anne.

"No one can understand," breathed the girl. "But you will come? I cannot tell you about it here. I am watched and—suspected. No—you do not understand! But come—come!"

Anne surveyed the other's face. It was very tense.

"But my chaperon!" she objected.

"Leave without her. Will you?"

Why she consented Anne never knew. In part she was sorry for Bianca Carnotti; much more she was curious as to what might possibly have transpired to put her in such agitation.

"You will come?"

Anne nodded. "When?"

"At one o'clock," whispered Bianca Carnotti.

Anne repeated her nod.

"The key hangs inside the vestibule. Come upstairs to the second-floor front and come in. Don't let any one see you. You promise?"

There was acquiescence in Anne's

gesture. Bianca Carnotti breathed a sigh of relief, and slipped away in the crowd. Anne followed.

A second later, the fronds of a palm near them parted, and a face looked out for an instant; then there was the faint sound of footsteps, going the other way.

CHAPTER II.

THE EBONY LETTER CASE.

When Bianca Carnotti left Anne Carr, she continued her anxious search for a face she had expected to see; and now, turning a corner of the orchid conservatory, she came into his line of vision. He was tall and square-faced, with a prim severity of manner, rather small-mouthed and small-eared. His eyes lighted up as he saw her.

"Bianca," he said, "I have been looking everywhere for you."

It was the voice which Redmayne had heard over the telephone.

He drew her down to a seat. "Have you done what I asked you?" he inquired.

"You mean—broken with my people?" she asked.

He nodded. "Whoever they are——"

"But there was no need for you to know," she almost wailed. "I have been honest with you, Hal, haven't I? You needn't ever have known that I'd been at all shady. Even now you've only my word for it. Why won't you let things take their natural course?"

Henry Carr, congressman from Virginia, and very much in love with Bianca Carnotti, frowned.

"When I asked you to marry me, dearie," he said gently, "you were frank enough to tell me that you were associated with some very suspicious characters. Also you said that this was the way you had made your living. There is no longer any necessity for that; therefore I tell you to break off with them. I don't think that is asking very much, is it?"

She nodded. "It is. You don't realize, and can't. I am necessary to them, and they need me very badly now. If I refuse to continue with them, to help them, they will think I am a traitor. I know too much to leave them until I have done my work and have been implicated as much as they—now do you understand?"

Carr swore. "A pretty state of affairs for a man's future wife to be in," he said.

"And don't you want me, sweetheart?"

Her eyes, soft, half closed, looked into his. Her lips trembled.

"Want you?" he cried, almost fiercely. "Want you!"

"Then you must let me have my own way, my——"

"No," he said, and his lips closed firmly.

"Is that final?"

"Yes."

She sighed wearily. "Very well, Hal," she said. "I will break off with them; but if the consequences are"—her eyes grew wide with fright; her teeth met—"very serious—even death?"

"Nonsense!" he said. "Sheer stuff and nonsense. This is Washington, and the twentieth century. You talk as though we lived in the days of the Guises. Death! Sweetheart, you are just like a woman! You make a mountain out of an ant heap!"

"You don't understand," she whispered. "But I will obey you. This very night I will break off with them for good and all; and then——"

"And then—just you and I, dear—just you and I!"

Her lips relaxed for him to kiss. For a second he breathed the perfume of her presence; then he released her.

"If you would tell me who the devil these people are, I'd soon settle their hash for them. I have some power here in Washington——"

She stroked his hair. "Poor boy! Just appointed from Virginia—what does he know of the world and the underworld of diplomacy?"

He was slightly nettled. "I only know I won't have you in it any longer."

As she arose, she sighed again. "Good-by, Hal!"

"Good-by?" he questioned, amazed.

She nodded. "If I am to break with them to-night, I must go now. And I say good-by because—well, one says good-by when one is going on a long journey!"

He ground his heel in irritation. "For heaven's sake, cut that sort of thing, will you? You're in no danger, I tell you. You're in Washington, and all you've got to do is to call me up on the telephone and I'll be with you as soon as a motor can bring me—not five minutes. So, how can you be in danger?"

"Kiss me anyhow, dear one," she said, and wound her arms about his neck.

A little later she had left him, and was telling one of the footmen to call her carriage.

She arrived at the house on I Street, shivering with a strange foreboding, and paid the driver for the evening. With a touch of his hat, the man drove off, leaving her fumbling with the iron latch of the gate set between the brick walls that guarded her grounds. The latch open, she turned and faced the street, a little ghost in gray against the black fog, the dripping trees and the yellow, sputtering lights of the night.

A hansom cab bowled by rapidly, and whizzing after it came a gigantic, hooded touring car, a monster shape suggestive of evil. She shivered a little under her cloak, and went within. The gate clicking behind struck a chill through her.

She passed along the graveled walk, through the box-yew hedges, and up the broad, low steps of the old brick house. From her hand bag she took a key and unlocked the door of the vestibule; then, on the stone flagging, she unlocked the inner door and hung the key on a little hook by the door, that Anne might find it there when she came. She passed into the dimly lighted hall, and up the broad staircase.

As she opened a door on the second landing, she let a flood of rose-colored light into the dark hall. For the moment she stood wondering how it might be that her lights were up; then the figure of a man smiling on her and waving two fingers in welcome caught her eye.

He was leaning against the mantel, lighting his cigar with a spill which he had ignited at the fire in the grate. The two fingers that he waved were bent and crooked—splay fingers; a livid crescent below his lips completed his identification. It was Guido Conradi, the Lombard, whom she had seen barely an hour ago at the Mallinfleurs. He was still in evening clothes, and wore the same boutonnière, a flaming orchid, in the lapel of his dress coat.

"What are you doing here?" she asked coldly.

"Success brings me," he replied, his beautiful eyes full upon her. "Success and the consciousness of having accomplished my task in such a way that even the most astute of America's criminal department would fail to find any clue to the perpetrator of the outrage."

She went suddenly white. "You mean?"

"I mean," he replied, taking his cigar from his lips and waving it about thoughtfully to make spirals and rings, "I mean that some one slipped a hint to Zuehohn that it was known just what was contained in his ebony letter case; because to-night at the Mallinfleurs' reception I saw the pocket of his coat bulging. I had known that he kept the ebony letter case in the safe at his apartments. It was this safe that we were to open to-morrow night, when he went to Annapolis to attend the ball. The knowledge that his ebony letter case was not safe must have come to him very recently; since he, most fastidious of men, carries the case under a tight-fitting uniform in such a way as to show its unmistakable outlines. I did not lose sight of him when I had made sure of this; and when he left the reception alone, I followed. He walked only to his cab. He had a four-wheeler; and I, on his heels, stepped in after him, asking him for a lift. He did not recognize my voice or see my face; but saw that I was in evening dress, and presumed that

he knew me. I held my hand in my greatcoat over my revolver. Somehow he got suspicious, and turned suddenly on me, just as we were under a street lamp. I dodged, but he caught sight of my face.

"'Oh! it's you—Conradi!'"

The narrator paused, and relighted his cigar. The girl still stood on the threshold of the door, not having moved from the time they had spoken the first words. Her face was strained, tense.

"Yes—yes?"

Conradi flicked away the ash from his cigar. "Well, there really wasn't much to say. I saw the game was absolutely up, so far as keeping my identity secret was concerned. So I wasted no more time, but brought my revolver out of my overcoat pocket and struck him heavily on the temple. He had drawn his own at the same moment, but quite too late; and he doubled up in one corner of the cab, with a very white face, and with his tongue sticking between his teeth. I crammed my hand under his blouse and pulled out the ebony letter case. Then I waited until we struck a dark part of Massachusetts Avenue, opened the cab door, and swung off. I fell in the middle of the street in a lot of mud." He looked ruefully at his fur-collared coat, which lay on a chair.

"But Caspar von Zuehohn—you didn't kill him?"

"I hope not," responded Guido Conradi, rubbing his livid crescent with his splay fingers. "I hope not, sincerely. Although it would have been better for me if I had. Because, with him alive and knowing that I took the ebony letter case, he'll have every secret agent of Saxonia on my heels. So I'll lose no time. I get out of Washington by the first train in the morning. I don't care where it takes me, so long as I get to some place away from railroads and telegraph wires. Some part of Texas, I should say—near the Mexican border. Meanwhile, I turn over the ebony letter case to you. Yves and Alleyne know nothing about this. They do not know that I followed Caspar von Zuehohn, or that I had any idea of securing the letter case to-night. They imagine that things are settled for to-morrow night. To-morrow night they will go to Caspar von Zuehohn's apartments, and find nothing in the safe—unless you tell them."

"You mean to cut loose from them in the division of the spoils?"

Guido Conradi smiled tolerantly. "Naturally, no. Yves first discovered the fact that von Zuehohn held this, and Alleyne is necessary for reasons we all know. But it would be well to let them try and fail before you inform them of your possession. There's no fear of playing them false. We four are too much bound together for that—even I would hesitate in cutting loose. Yes, I'm even a bit afraid that——"

"But with your disappearance and Casper von Zuehohn's condition—which the driver will undoubtedly discover and make public——"

"I had forgotten that," said Guido Conradi regretfully. "I suppose you'd better tell them to-morrow morning, and get the wheels immediately in motion. I know Prince Boris will pay millions as the price of what is within that ebony letter case. All that is necessary is to convince him that you have it. Or the queen would pay as much more, if you can convince her to the same purpose. She knows that von Gotthold is dead, and that the letters have pased into Caspar von Zuehohn's possession; for Gotthold wrote her as much when he lay dying. Had she not been a fool she would have written to Caspar to destroy them. But she was fearful that they were not all there—that they would not be properly destroyed. Pah—what a woman!"

He struck another match, and under its blaze the livid crescent showed, an ugly patch above his square chin.

"Nor would she trust the mails or the dispatch boxes. Caspar must bring them to her himself. And so—the ebony case is now in our possession." He reflected. "Who could have warned Caspar?"

His eyes narrowed, and he put the splay fingers to his mouth. A cold perspiration started to Bianca Carnotti's forehead, and her eyes avoided his. But it was plain that he did not suspect her.

He reached into the pocket of his dress coat presently, and took out a long, thin box of ebony, stamped with a coat of arms in three colors, supports and crest in gold. It was very much scratched and battered; but the gold crown above the coat of arms shone as resplendent as it had shone on the day the blazoner had placed it there. Guido Conradi held it off, gazing at it.

"A royal crest," he murmured. "A very royal crest—that five-pointed crown."

He handed it to the girl, who examined it with shaking fingers. It was locked, but quite invisibly; a certain point of the crown opening and shutting it. Guido Conradi did not give her this information.

"They are here," he said. "All of them—every one of them. I have examined, and I know."

"But how may one open it?" she asked.

He looked at her with a certain sly cunning. "It is not necessary that you should know. Either the queen or Prince Boris knows the secret. There is no need for you to know."

"You do not trust me?" she asked.

"Not altogether," he replied.

"What is there to prevent my breaking open the case?" she asked defiantly.

"The fact that you may destroy the letters in so doing," he replied, with great calm. "The papers are so arranged in the compartments that the lock cannot be forced without grinding them to a pulp—a sort of screw movement," he added, smiling. "A very wise precaution on the part of the inventor."

He arose. "I must go now," he said, and took her hand. "I shall write you to the post-office box when I find myself in a place sufficiently remote. I shall expect to be kept informed as to your progress."

She nodded uneasily. "Don't write to the box. I've given it up. I'm afraid to carry letters to and fro on the street any more. Write to me—here!"

He slipped into his fur coat. "Very well," he said, and took hat and stick in hand. "Meanwhile—good night and good-by. I shall expect to hear good news from you when I write you of my whereabouts. You will go to Saxonia?"

She nodded. "To Dresig," she replied. "That is the only place where I may get into communication with both the queen and Prince Boris."

"So be it," he said, and lifted her hand to his lips. Then he was gone.

She heard his footsteps echoing down the uncarpeted stairs; heard the front door close behind him; then silence.

She arose, the letter case in her hand, and walked up and down before the fire. Catching sight of herself in the mirror above the mantel, she realized that she was still in her evening cloak; and she unhooked it and let it drop unnoticed to the floor. She stripped her arms of the long gloves and dropped them on the opera cloak; then sank down before the fire, staring into it, a hopeless little figure, the firelight shining on her pale hair.

As she sat, she fingered the letter case and saw the gleam of the flames on its shining ebony, and the golden light from the five-pointed crown. She eyed it rather helplessly, doubting what she should do.

So absorbed was she that she did not hear the light footfall on the stairs, or the gentle knock on the door. The knock came again, a trifle louder; and still she stared, absorbed in her meditations. The one without opened the door and entered. Bianca, looking up with a little start, saw Anne.

She arose, holding out both hands to her. The dark-haired girl by the doorway, muffled in white fur, her eyes shining and cheeks glowing from the rain and mist, came forward impulsively and put both hands in hers. Bianca

Carnotti's head dropped on Anne's shoulder, and she sobbed.

"There—there, dear!" said Anne, troubled. She soothed and quieted the other, gently, as a mother might have done. Presently the sobbing ceased, Bianca looking up with tearful eyes.

"I'm such a big baby," she said. "But I—I was—was afraid to be alone tonight. I—I was afraid——"

Anne soothed her again, caressing her shoulder.

"What is the matter, dear?"

"Oh, I was such a fool to send for you. But I thought I must tell you, must have your comfort—maybe—your love. Hal—your brother—has—asked me—to marry him!"

The statement did not surprise Anne; she had heard from her brother's lips much about Bianca Carnotti. And she was accustomed to believe that what Hal Carr desired to do he generally did. So far as Bianca was concerned, she had no objections. Bianca was pretty and well-bred, if a trifle mysterious.

"Well, dear," she said, "I am sure I congratulate you both." Leaning over, she kissed Bianca, who began to weep afresh at this, clinging to Anne, and begging forgiveness.

Anne smiled gently. "You *are* a baby, you know! Why should you ask *me* for forgiveness? I'm sure I'm very glad."

She arose. "And now I must go," she said, "or I'll have no shred of reputation left. I could see our coachman looking at me most dubiously when I came in here. He'll have a pretty tale to spread about when I get back. So—good night, dear—and come and see me in the morning."

Bianca clung to her. "Take me home with you," she begged. "I am afraid to remain here. I'm afraid!"

"But the servants——" began Anne.

"Have all gone for the night—and Annette, my maid, is in the hospital. I'm afraid. Take me home with you!"

Anne kissed her. "Come, then, dear!"

But as she spoke Bianca's eyes grew wide with fright. Her lips trembled, and her body shook.

"Listen!" she said.

There was the sound of a stair creaking, as though some one trod lightly upon it.

Bianca caught Anne's arms. *"Dios!"* she breathed.

The creak came again from the hallway; then nearer.

Bianca, terrified, ran to the door, closing it; but before she could lock it the knob was turned from the outside, and the door slowly swung inward again.

CHAPTER III.

SINGLE COMBAT.

Redmayne quitted the Mallinfleurs with a well-developed case of the sulks. He had been unable to find Anne Carr; and, missing her, had not even found Caspar von Zuehohn again. He considered himself highly aggrieved, more especially in view of the fact that he had been corralled in a corner by one of the persons whom he most desired to avoid, a young lady from Pittsburg with an Italian ducal title, purchased very cheaply along with the diminutive specimen of perfumed manhood whose birthright it was. The duchessa had designs upon a house party which Redmayne's aunt was giving at her country home in Virginia; and her conversation consisted mainly of hints calculated to bring forth a statement from Redmayne that he would suggest to his aunt that the duchessa be included among the guests.

He escaped from her, only to fall into the hands of one of the "cliff dwellers," as the older Washington residents are termed by the diplomatic set. This lady, whose family subsisted upon a government clerkship held by her son, was bewailing the fact that Washington society had betaken itself to the kennels, when such people as the Mallinfleurs were able to crowd their portals with its representatives. Redmayne felt a wild desire to ask her why she had come, since it so super-

latively displeased her; but he was an amiable young man by nature, and forebore. Fleeing from her, he took no further chances; but, getting below, caught up hat, coat and stick, and went out into the night.

He found a stray cab outside, entered it, and drove to the Beauregard Club in hopes of finding there some friend to whom he might explain what a very badly treated young man he was. But the club was barren of congenial companions; only a few elderly gentlemen were reading the back files of the European newspapers.

"Snuffy old idiots!" he said viciously, and rang for some whisky and soda. This disposed of, he stalked out in moody majesty toward home.

Redmayne occupied the family home on H Street; that is to say, he occupied the second floor of it. The rest of the house was closed and not in use. Redmayne's suite consisted of what had once been drawing-room, library and reception room; the last he had made into a bedroom. Diogenes had betaken himself to the attic where he slept; the fires, freshly banked, were smouldering gently. Redmayne struck a match and lighted a cigarette, then glanced at the Sèvres clock on the mantel. It stood at a quarter past twelve.

"Rot!" he said, and examined it again. He took out his watch and found the hour to be one seventeen. It was evident that the clock had stopped. This was annoying, for he placed great confidence in the time-keeping qualities of that Sèvres clock. It had never failed him before. His watch was not so trustworthy.

He crossed the room to the telephone, and unhooked the receiver, intending to inquire the correct time. Instantly he received a shock; a woman's voice was screaming in his ear.

"Send a policeman quickly——"

And the scream again.

"For God's sake, help m——"

A muffled sound, as though a hand were placed over the mouth of the speaker; the crash of some heavy body falling to the floor; the jar of the dropped telephone receiver.

Redmayne stood quite still for one brief second. During that space of time there seemed to be a great white circle in the darkness at the other end of the room; on this circle, which was apparently the lime shadow of a stereopticon, he saw three distinct mental pictures—first, the face of Bianca Carnotti, with its pale hair and purple-irised eyes; second, the brick-walled house with the yew hedges; third, a man striking a woman.

A flood of red came before his eyes; the white circle was obscured. He set his teeth and swore; then, without further thought save to aid and to punish, he threw himself at his dressing-room door, flung it open, passed fleetly thence to his bedroom, threw up the window sash, swung off on the roof of the little outhouse a few feet below, and clambered along the ledge of the garden fence. Dropping into the slippery alley, he ran, bareheaded, his white shirt front smeared with the grime of the fence, his thin pumps soaking up water, his ankles immersed.

Once he slipped and fell headlong into the gutter; and arose, plastered with mud, his face and hair dripping. He hardly knew he had fallen; but threw himself against the iron-barred gate of the brick wall which gave entrance to the Carnottis' house. It resisted.

Wasting no further time on the thought of breaking it down, he sprang upward, clutching the ivy branches, drawing himself to the top of the wall, and pulling himself flat across it. The broken glass cut his hands and tore his white silk waistcoat; but he only swore softly and dragged himself upon the roof of the stable. Dropping on the soft, mushy earth of the garden, he tore through rose bushes, knocked over geranium pots, and, stumbling, almost falling, reached the cellar door.

It was padlocked, but the wood was old and rotting.

He dragged up a block of stone which served as an urn for some asters, and hurled it on the cellar door. It shivered, creaked, collapsed; and the urn smashed down the wooden steps.

Redmayne was after it, groping through the dank cellar, the smell of earth and creeping things in his nostrils.

Rats scurried before him; his face was enmeshed with the webs of spiders. Once he fell against a bin, and several wine bottles rolled out, broken, the liquid spilling over his already soaked ankles. Now he was slipping amid a coal heap; then his accustomed eyes made out a stairway. He sprang up its creaking steps. There was a door at the top—unlocked!

He threw it open, and disclosed a sputtering gaslight in a musty hall.

Forward to the main staircase! To his ears came the half-suppressed scream of a woman. He went up three steps at a leap. It was quite dark, save for the pale, rose-colored glimmer coming through an uneven place in a door. He wasted no time, but flung the door open.

Momentarily he stood quite still!

Sprawling on her back lay Bianca Carnotti, her head against the iron fender, her eyes closed, her hair loose, red bruises on neck and shoulders. At the end of the room, Anne Chilton Carr, the ebony letter case held high in air, was struggling with a man in a hooded coat.

Redmayne, the ultra-civilized, was not recognizable in the dirty, ragged creature who sprang upon the man's back, clutching his throat from behind. With one savage jerk, he freed Anne and brought the man to his knees. His fingers sank deep into the man's gullet; he brought his knee heavily on the pit of the fellow's stomach. Releasing the throat with one hand, he struck again and again between the eyes with bare knuckles, squeezing the throat all the while with the fingers of the other hand.

But the man, once over the surprise of his attack, did not long permit this. Wriggling from Redmayne's grasp, he sprang to the fireplace, where the nickel fittings of a revolver gleamed beside the insensible Bianca Carnotti. He seized, leveled and discharged the weapon in a single moment; and Redmayne had a sharp pain in the shoulder—a burning, tearing pain.

His foot shot out and caught the man's wrist; the revolver again dropped by the fender, and this time it was Redmayne who caught it up and fired pointblank at his assailant.

The man caught his hand to his breast, staggered, and made a sudden rush for Redmayne, who fired again. The other, panting, flung himself out of the door, slamming it behind him. In the same second Redmayne followed him. But the man ran, slid, stumbled swiftly down the steps, and flung open the front door.

Before Redmayne had reached the graveled walk, the man had slammed the iron gate behind him; and, as Redmayne dragged the gate open again, he saw his enemy climbing into a cab across the street. Instantly the cabman whipped up his horses and drove furiously down the street.

And now Redmayne noted that another carriage stood before the house; on the box a man slumbered peacefully in the rain. Redmayne smiled grimly. Anne's carriage, and the driver had slept through his mistress' danger!

He ran swiftly back to the house, up the stairs, and back to the room, where Anne was bending over the senseless Bianca, tears dropping on the latter's neck and shoulders. She looked up with terrified apprehensions as Redmayne entered.

"Well—what more?" she asked.

Redmayne stared at her. As his brain became clearer, he realized that she evidently considered him to be one of the attackers. Events had come so quickly, climaxes had been brought about with such suddenness, that this girl, accustomed only to a life of quiet, had been confused as to cause and effect.

Glancing at himself in the mirror over the mantel, Redmayne felt that he could hardly blame her.

His face was bruised, bloody and scratched; his collar gone; a limp, dirty string where his white lawn dress tie had been; his shirt a mass of soiled and crumpled linen; the buttons had

been torn off his silken waistcoat, which hung open and dripped water; his trousers were torn at the knees and bottoms.

He found a handkerchief in the pocket of his dress coat and wiped away some of the grime and dirt; then pushed the hair from his eyes. The revolver he placed carefully on the mantel. Then he looked again at Anne.

"I don't think you remember me," he said gently. "I am Arnold Redmayne, whom you met to-night at the Mallinfleurs'. Miss Carnotti is on the same wire as myself. I had taken down my telephone receiver when I heard a woman's cry for help. I knew Miss Carnotti was the only one on my wire; and so I came immediately, over fences, through an alley, and through a cellar. That accounts for my condition."

She stared at him again; her eyes melted, and she put out both hands.

"Mr. Redmayne," she half sobbed, "forgive me! You've been—you've been—oh, how can I thank you!"

"Don't try," he responded. "I think the best thing to do is to call for a doctor for Miss Carnotti. Meanwhile, let us make her more comfortable."

Though his wound was giving him intense pain, he brought his teeth together, and lifted the senseless body of Bianca from the floor to the divan, throwing over her a silken coverlet. Then he took down the telephone receiver and asked for the number of an army surgeon he knew who had been at the Mallinfleurs' reception, and who therefore was likely still to be up. He discovered his surmise to be correct, and received word that the doctor would be on hand as soon as he was able to throw a few things together.

"Now, is there any one else you would like to call?" he asked. "By the bye, your carriage is outside, and your coachman sleeping peacefully all through the rumpus."

"Call my brother, Mr. Henry Carr, at——" She supplied an address. "Miss Carnotti is—is his—she is engaged to him."

Redmayne suppressed a groan of pain, as the wounded shoulder twinged. The girl did not realize that he had been hurt, nor did she see the look. He called up the given address, and spoke with Anne's brother.

"Miss Carnotti wants you immediately—immediately," he said. "I haven't time to answer questions. She's at her house. Your sister is here, also. Hurry!"

He rang off and, controlling his face so that it showed no indication of the pain he felt, looked at Anne Carr.

"Now—if you don't mind telling me," he said. "I'd like very much to know what all this is about."

First he told her of the interrupted conversation over the telephone earlier in the evening, which had made him aware of the fact that Miss Carnotti was on his wire. Then he waited expectantly.

Anne told him briefly how she had happened to come, and of Bianca's request to take her home. They had been about to go when the door opened, and a man came in, forcing Bianca back into the room.

"That man!" exclaimed Redmayne, with a vicious look. "I've seen him somewhere before—I won't forget that birthmark under his lip—I didn't get a good view, but that red crescent is all the identification that I need."

"I know his name," said Anne quietly.

Redmayne waited.

"He is called Conradi," she said; "an Italian newspaper correspondent."

"Guido Conradi!" he almost shouted.

She nodded. "Guido Conradi! He came in, and his face wasn't like a human being's at all—just dead white, and with a horrible look in the eyes. He saw me, and bowed very respectfully, saying good evening to me just as though he were meeting me under the usual circumstances; then he began to talk in Italian with Bianca. Probably he didn't know that I spent a year in Rome at the art schools and understood all he said. First——"

"Tell me exactly what his words were," interrupted Redmayne.

She wrinkled her brows. "I'll see if I can remember. Well, something like this. He said: 'I've found out who warned Caspar von Zuehohn since I've been here. I saw Yves—left him only a moment ago—went to his rooms to get my traveling case—and he says that it was *you* who warned Caspar that——'"

She broke off. "I didn't catch exactly what it was she'd warned him about, but it was something about tomorrow night."

Redmayne's face was wrinkled in thought also. "Caspar von Zuehohn," he said meditatively. His eye fell upon the ebony letter case which lay on the floor by Anne's side. "Why, that's Caspar's—that's Caspar's!" he exclaimed. "I saw him take that from his great-coat pocket and put it under his blouse just before we got out at the Mallinfleurs'."

She looked mystified. "I don't understand it at all," she said. "Surely he——"

"Maybe Caspar gave it to Miss Carnotti," hazarded Redmayne.

The girl poured some more violet water on her hands, and rubbed Bianca's forehead. "No," she decided, with pursed lips.

"Well, go on—what else did Conradi say?"

She continued to massage the Italian girl's forehead. "He said: 'You've been a traitor to us—you've sold us out, haven't you? Well, the others will attend to your case; but just now I want that ebony letter case I gave you."

"Ah!" said Redmayne. "Then Conradi gave her Caspar's letter case——"

He turned the ebony affair over and over between his palms. "It's mystifying enough, certainly," he agreed, and felt his shoulder, closing his eyes and grating his teeth. "But go on!"

"Well, Bianca said she would not give him the letter case; and then, without saying any more, he caught her and tried to snatch it out of her hands. She screamed and threw it across the room, and I picked it up. Conradi came toward me, and I passed it back to Bianca. She ran toward the door, but slipped on the hearth rug and caught her foot in it; and came down. She struck her head a terrible blow on the fender—you can see that—and the letter case fell at my feet. I picked it up before Conradi could reach it, ran to the telephone and took down the receiver. I had just called for help when Conradi pushed me away from it; and I slipped and fell, too. But I didn't hurt myself, and I still held that letter case tight, because I supposed that it must be very important if Bianca wouldn't give it up and he wanted it so much that he used violence toward women. I got behind that divan there, and he stood on the other side, looking at me but not saying anything, only breathing very heavily. I couldn't help thinking what beautiful eyes he had!"

"I thought you said they were expressionless," broke in Redmayne, annoyed.

"Not when he looked at me. He didn't attempt any more violence for the moment; but began to talk in that very soothing, soft voice of his."

"Oily beggar!" muttered Redmayne vindictively.

"He told me that Miss Carnotti had cajoled that letter case out of him; that it contained letters that would seriously harm a friend of his; that Miss Carnotti was that friend's enemy, and that he had inadvertently placed the letters in her hands for safe keeping, not knowing about the enmity between the two. Oh, he was very persuasive, and I might almost have been tempted to turn the letters over to him if I'd followed my natural sympathies; but the letter case was Bianca's, for all I knew; and I had no right to dispose of her property. So I refused to give him the case."

"And then he attacked you, did he?" snarled Redmayne.

"Oh, dear, no—not at first! He tried to frighten me before using brute force. He took from his overcoat and pointed at me that same revolver you have. Said he would count five—at the end of that time, if I hadn't given him the

box, he would fire. But I didn't think he would—although I was terribly frightened and came near giving it to him—but then something told me that he really wouldn't fire, that he was only pretending. So I laughed at him. I rather pride myself on that laugh. It was very well done, I think. And he put the revolver on the mantel and made a grab for me—and he was fearfully strong. I just held the case as high as I could in air, and tried to get away. All I remember was that he held me very tightly—so tightly that I thought I was being suffocated, and his face brushed mine. Then——"

She blushed suddenly, and the crimson spread until both cheeks were aflame.

"And then he—the beast!—he kissed me, and I struck him and got away again. It was just when he had taken hold of me for the second time that you came in and—but, Mr. Redmayne—what's the matter?"

For Redmayne, under the stress of his anger that Guido Conradi should have had his lips to those of the girl, had overexerted himself; and the wound which he had stopped with his handkerchief now began to flow afresh, inundating his coat.

"Mr. Redmayne, you're—oh!"

She gave a little feminine scream and came to him, with her own handkerchief in her hand. Quickly she bade him discard coat and waistcoat; and, clenching her teeth to steady herself against the sight of blood, soaked her handkerchief with the violet water and put it to the bleeding place.

At the same time they heard a carriage outside; and Redmayne, staggering to the window, saw over the brick wall a four-wheeler draw up before the house. Before the fare had alighted, the whir of a motor came to his ears; and there, puffing alongside the four-wheeler, an automobile came to a stop.

"Ha!" breathed the girl.

"And Major Stearns," said Redmayne, adding under his breath a fervent prayer of thankfulness. He was afraid he could not have held his pain in check very much longer.

"Listen!" he said rapidly. "Don't say anything to your brother about Guido Conradi. He would make the whole matter public, and Conradi would get clean away. We want him to believe that he wasn't recognized; to lull him into a sense of security, so that he'll stay in Washington until I can get my fingers on him again. Tell your brother everything except the name and the business about the ebony letter case. Keep those two things secret. I know the chief of the Secret Service. I'll see him this very night, when my wound is dressed, and tell him the facts in the case. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile—take this!" she said, handing him the ebony letter case. "I am afraid to keep it. You will guard it, won't you?"

He nodded. There was in his head some wild desire to answer her with a tender speech which would incorporate the phrase "with my life," but somehow he was afraid she would laugh at him.

And now the doorbell was jangling below.

CHAPTER IV.

ASSASSINATION.

It was well past noon before Redmayne awoke on the day following; and, while he waited for Diogenes to bring him his cup of chocolate, he lay back, propped up by two pillows, staring across the sunlit space of the room toward the brick wall of the house on I Street, the rear windows of which faced his own. He reviewed the events of the past night, much in the manner of one who has witnessed a highly absorbing play which refuses to depart from his mind.

The telephone calls, the scramble across fences and alleys, through a cellar and a strange house, the fight in Miss Carnotti's boudoir, the escape of Conradi, the tale that Anne had told him. Caspar von Zuehohn was mixed up in it somehow through that ebony letter case; Bianca had warned Caspar of some impending danger, and had thereby betrayed somebody else. The

ebony letter case was sufficient inducement for Conradi to attack a woman and endeavor to murder Redmayne.

He felt his shoulder gingerly; there was only a slight stiffness there. The wound itself was very far from being serious, the bullet having gone through only a portion of the shoulder, without touching a bone or seriously harming a muscle. Major Stearns had dressed and bound it for him; and had told him that he would be quite fit in a week's time, so far as using the shoulder was concerned.

But Bianca Carnotti! That was a more serious case. Concussion of the brain, Stearns had called it, and had ordered her instant removal to a hospital, sending Henry Carr almost wild with grief and rage. An ambulance had conveyed Miss Carnotti to the hospital, Stearns accompanying her and forbidding Carr to come. Carr had taken his sister home, and had spent the rest of the night at police headquarters, endeavoring to turn out the whole force to search for the murderous assailant of his fiancée. The papers had got hold of it; and he was besieged by the late men of all the morning dailies.

Redmayne had returned to his rooms, awakened Diogenes, and telephoned for the assistant chief of the Secret Service bureau, whom he knew quite well. He had a very shrewd suspicion that this case of Miss Carnotti was no affair for the police, but for the national agents of quiet and order. The assistant chief had been in bed; but Redmayne urged the necessity of immediate action, and had already sent for his chauffeur to take his car to the assistant chief's house and bring him speedily. Redmayne received the assistant chief, whose name was Davison, in dressing gown and slippers, and told him the entire story, showing him the ebony letter case.

"I guess you're right," affirmed Davison, after hearing the tale. "It's probably some diplomatic imbroglio. Saxonia's been indiscreet in some matter; Caspar von Zuehohn has managed to get the papers showing the indiscretion; and this man Conradi and his companions caught on to the fact. They tried to get the papers, and no doubt succeeded. Miss Carnotti was to be the sales agent in selling them back to Saxonia. A woman can always do that sort of thing better than a man. You can't kick a woman, you know. But when she got engaged to Carr, she thought it was time for her to chuck the game; so she warned Caspar. Conradi gets the letter case, brings it to her, and goes away. Hasn't been away long before he discovers she's played informer. Naturally, she's not to be trusted, and he wants the papers back. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

He turned the letter case over and over between his palms, wondering as to how it might open; then tossed it on the table.

"Guess we've got no right to tamper with it," he said. "It probably wouldn't help us, anyway. But it's up to you to lock that thing in your safe and keep it there until called for. The best thing to do now, in my mind, is to call up Captain von Zuehohn and ask him to come over and give us a line on the proceedings."

They called Caspar's apartments unavailingly for fully ten minutes. Finally a sleepy voice answered. It was Caspar's servant, who averred that his master had not yet reached home.

Davison looked at his watch. "Four o'clock," he said, and whistled. "Whew—that looks serious!"

But there was plainly nothing further to be done that night. Davison promised that a description of Conradi would be promptly wired to every railroad station and steamer dock; and that he would endeavor to render it impossible for the Lombard to leave Washington.

"A man will go to his apartments at once and take possession," he said. "And I'll have two more detailed to watch Yves and Alleyne—you're not the first to tell me about that combination of blackguards. The rest we'll have to figure out. This isn't a Secret Service affair at all, you know," he added. "It's a case either for the po-

lice or for the diplomatic agents. If those papers concern the United States, our secret agents should take it up. If Saxonia is playing fast and loose with some other country, it's her lookout to get hold of and punish Conradi. But, so far as the attack on Miss Carnotti is concerned, that's police business pure and simple."

"Then under what pretext are you going to take it up?" asked Redmayne.

Davison winked wisely. "Give the bureau an idea it has something to do with counterfeiting or something of that sort—and as far as we know it *may* have, mayn't it? Then it becomes our lookout, you see?"

"It's awfully kind of you, Davison," said Redmayne.

"Not at all, old man," answered the assistant chief. "Counterfeiters have been behaving themselves lately, and smugglers have quieted down a bit, and our men are getting rusty. Even the anarchists are playing nicey-nice. So it won't hurt our people to stretch their wits a bit in this cause."

"There won't be any publicity?" urged Redmayne. "Because that would put Conradi on his guard. He'd go and hide somewhere, then, like a fox in a burrow."

"Oh, we'll keep the undercurrent of the thing out of the papers," said Davison. "The Washington correspondents will know about it, of course; but if we send them word that the thing is to be treated as though the assailant and his purpose were unknown, they'll do it. They get too many good stories from us to risk incurring our dislike. Well, come in and see me to-morrow, and we'll talk it over some more. Hope your shoulder doesn't hurt you much."

It was after Davison had gone that Redmayne had allowed Diogenes to put him to bed, with strict orders not to awaken him.

He had already rung twice for Diogenes, which meant that his pot of chocolate was to be brought; and by the time he had finished his cigarette and his ruminations, Diogenes appeared with chocolate pot and cup, some hot rolls, and a pat of fresh butter.

He carried also, under his arm, two morning papers, which he presented with somewhat of an apologetic air to his master, pointing to the headlines of the Carnotti affair. Redmayne had told the man his entire story, for he had often found Diogenes' counsel quite useful in personal affairs, and imagined that it might be so in this case also.

Redmayne nodded, and buttered a roll. Munching it between sips from the chocolate cup, he read all the papers had to say about the affair—which was not a great deal in anything but words. The story was very important, concerning as it did four persons so widely known in Washington society as Henry Carr, his sister, his fiancée, and Arnold Redmayne, the fourth of that name, who was as welcome in the drawing-rooms of Mayfair, Fifth Avenue, and the Faubourg St. Germain as he was in those of Dupont Circle.

The stories were full of theories and hazards. Neither of the papers inclined to the theory of plain burglary, but none had any very clear idea as to what the motive was; most of them hinting darkly of a former lover who had discovered the secret engagement between the Virginia congressman and Miss Carnotti. One paper ventured to wonder how it was that a girl of Miss Carnotti's lack of wealth had managed to keep up an entire establishment on I Street, and also to ask why she did it. The second had no clearer ideas on the subject than had its contemporary.

Arnold Redmayne threw both away, and laughed at the glowing panegyrics to which the reporters had treated themselves in their descriptions of his mad dash across fences and alleys.

"Quite a hero of romance," he said to Diogenes, pointing to the paragraphs dealing with himself, in which his brief military experience had been embellished by several feats which he had no recollection of performing, and his filibustering exploit made to outshine those of the great William Walker.

The family physician, for whom his servant had telephoned, came and bound up his shoulder again. Red-

mayne attired himself with scrupulous care, and later breakfasted. While thus engaged, he asked Diogenes to call Captain von Zuehohn on the telephone. He was smoking a cigarette when Diogenes returned and wrote on a slip of paper the fact that Caspar von Zuehohn had not returned home on the previous night, that his servant did not know where he was, and that he had telephoned all the clubs without success.

Diogenes lifted his eyebrows inquiringly when his master had finished reading the slip. Redmayne only shook his head, wrinkling his brows and pursing his lips. He lighted another cigarette, his mood abstracted.

Caspar was connected in some way with the attack on Miss Carnotti. But in what way—as a friend or as an enemy of Guido Conradi? Certainly not the first, for he had spoken of Conradi as a scoundrel, and had been barely civil to him at the reception. Then as an enemy. How did Conradi manage to possess himself of the ebony letter case of which Caspar had been so careful? There was only one solution of that problem—the case had been taken away by force.

Foul play again!

Redmayne sat quite still and silent while Diogenes cleared the table. For a long time there was no noise save the occasional droning of life in the streets without, and the rattle of wheels. He lighted another cigarette, still pondering.

Quite abruptly the silence was shattered by the voice of a newsboy, shrill, high, tempestuous.

"Extree—extree—all erbout the murder in a cab—extree! All erbout th' awful murder of er dee-ploh-mat! Extree—extree!"

Redmayne started, overturning his chair. He ran to the window, threw up the sash, and for the first time in his life did that most undignified of things—shouted to some one in the street from his own house.

"Hi, there, you boy—newsboy!"

The urchin turned. "Poiper, mister?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Redmayne. "Wait!"

He did not tarry for Diogenes to come, but ran down the steps and threw open the front door. He had no pennies, but, after snatching the paper from the boy, threw him a dime and, without waiting for change, closed the door and ran back to his room.

A moment later, Diogenes, entering the room, saw his master head downward on a couch, dry sobs shaking his body. He came closer, eying him sympathetically, and looked about for the cause of this emotional upheaval. It was not hard to find.

A newspaper, torn half across, lay by the side of the couch, with the word "extra" printed twice at the top of its columns in large black letters.

Diogenes picked it up, and his eye was instantly arrested by the scarehead type straight across its front.

DIPLOMAT ASSASSINATED.

Struck Down While Returning From the Mallinfleur Reception.

CAPTAIN CASPAR VON ZUEHOHN, ATTACHÉ OF SAXONIAN EMBASSY.

Cabman Remembers Two Men Entering, But Does Not Remember Assassin's Face. No Clue to Murderer's Identity.

CHAPTER V.

REDMAYNE MAKES A VOW.

It was a very pale young man, whose card bore the name of "Arnold Redmayne," who was ushered into the inner sanctum of Davison, assistant chief of the Secret Service bureau.

Davison was going through masses of typewritten letters prepared for signature when he entered, the chief clerk standing at his back and explaining the nature of each.

"One moment, Mr. Redmayne," said Davison, in his official manner.

He finished the last of the papers rapidly, and allowed the chief clerk to depart.

"Now," he said.

"Well—you've read the afternoon

papers, haven't you?" asked Redmayne sullenly. "Caspar has been murdered."

"Quite so," agreed Davison. "But the murder happened before the attack on Miss Carnotti."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, probably to secure the ebony letter case, Guido Conradi killed your friend."

"Have you any of the facts in the case?" asked Redmayne.

"Facts! As many as could be gathered. My men have been on the thing ever since five o'clock this morning, when the cabman gathered enough courage and drove to the Fifteenth Street station with the dead body. He is locked up now, pending examination by the coroner's jury, and may afterward have to stand trial himself. I'm not of the opinion that he is implicated. He looks like a fairly respectable old darky—about fifty-five or sixty, he is—and swears he was a slave of some cousins of the Carrs, the Willoughbys. He tells a pretty straight story, but can't explain how it was that the murder occurred at probably one o'clock, and the body was not turned over to the proper authorities until five, except that 'Ah wuz so natchully scahed toe deaf, boss, Ah didn't know whafo toe do, an' Ah jes' keep on drivin' an' drivin' and drivin'."

Davison read the quotation in a very good imitation of a querulous old darky's tone, with slightly humorous intent.

But Redmayne did not smile; he only stared hard at his boots. "The facts!" he said.

"Here they are, straight enough. Caspar von Zuehohn left the Mallinfleurs' at twelve-fifteen, and got into a stray four-wheeler that was waiting around the Circle. Another man entered the cab at the same time, apparently with the consent of Von Zuehohn. They drove away. No one saw anything but an amicable relationship between them. Went down Massachusetts Avenue."

Davison stuffed his pipe and lighted it, then picked up a slip of paper.

"This is from a society man here whom you know well enough. But you do not know that he is in the employ of the government. He is not in our service; he's much too good for that. He's a secret agent of the Department of State, and would be just the man to work this entire mystery out to its solution, if we could get him—but we can't. I wrote and asked him to help me out regarding the whereabouts of Guido Conradi, about the time Caspar took himself off. He was at the Mallinfleurs' last night, and knows Conradi and von Zuehohn both quite well. He writes:

"Conradi kept in vicinity of Von Z. all during reception. Got into conversation once or twice with him. Always noted C. about. Von Z. is carrying some sort of letter case inside his tunic; showed a plain square under the army cloth. Very evident as to what it was. Probably cause of his murder, if not there now. Good reason to suspect Conradi. Bad lot. Mixed up with Saxonian secret agency. Dropped by Wittschaeft, and dares not enter Saxonia again. Warrant for him there. Watch Alleyne, Yves, and Shackleford in this matter. Probably accomplices of Conradi. The trouble with Bianca Carnotti last night probably due to this same crew. She was one of them until very recently."

The slip was typewritten and unsigned.

"Shackleford!" ejaculated Redmayne.

"I didn't even know he was in Washington until I got this," said Davison. "Lord! But"—he paused—"that man who wrote that slip seems to know everything. No wonder he is the dean of the secret agents at thirty-five."

"But who is this Shackleford?" asked Redmayne.

"You don't know Shackleford?" asked Davison, somewhat in amazement. "Paul Shackleford—the man who was at the head of the Honduras lottery, the man who posed as a Spanish marquis at Newport last season and carried on a crooked baccarat game at a hired cottage!"

"De Cordova!" exclaimed Redmayne.

"The same. I didn't know he was in Washington. This man"—he touched the slip—"did! There's a note at the bottom of the slip. Let's see—it's in handwriting.

"Shackleford is stopping at the Shoreham under the name of James K. Hull."

"The Shoreham!"

Davison was somewhat admiring. "That's the cheek of Shackleford! Any one else would have taken lodgings in a somewhat inconspicuous part of town. But not that fine young man. I've had a watch put on the Shoreham ever since I got this slip."

Redmayne tugged at his mustache. "But that's enough of Shackleford," he said. "What more about Caspar's murder? What did the cabman say?"

"Simply that he had driven Caspar to his apartments, pulled up, thought his fare asleep, tried to awaken him, and found him dead. Then, terrified, had driven all over town with him."

"And that's all?"

"Absolutely all! But there's not much mystery about it. Guido Conradi undoubtedly killed him to get that ebony letter case."

"And you haven't succeeded in getting a line on that infernal scoundrel yet!"

Davison shook his head. "His apartments are deserted; he was not to be found at Yves' or at Alleyne's, although my men thoroughly searched the premises when their owners were away. There's a man following both Yves and Alleyne at the present time; but neither has discovered anything of the slightest importance, as yet."

The telephone rang. He took down the receiver.

"Hello. Yes, this is Mr. Davison. Yes—what's that? Has—what—what's that you say? Has—has—disappeared! But where—how? What!"

He listened with blank face. Then:

"Come back to the office immediately. I'll give you just ten minutes."

He put down the telephone receiver, and touched a button. The chief clerk entered.

"More developments in the Carnotti case," Davison said to him. "Take these orders, please. The twenty horsepower Raisser to go into commission immediately with Coman and Wammell, Wammell in charge. Harper and Lane to get their motor cycles into commission and report to Wammell. All four to be provided with emergency money for necessary expenses, and to be ordered on a secret mission without question of time. Wammell to receive orders direct from me. Got that?"

The chief clerk looked up from his stenographic notes, and nodded.

"That's all for the moment, then. When Wammell comes in, have him sent to me immediately."

He turned to Redmayne, who was gripping the table with ill-concealed anxiety.

"You've got news of Guido Conradi, then?"

"News!" answered Davison, with acidity. "I should say we have got news. And it isn't the kind you'll be glad to hear, either. Miss Anne Carr's coachman——"

"Has anything happened to Miss Carr?" blazed Redmayne.

"You know the hospital where Miss Carnotti is? It is on the Tenallytown Pike, some few miles out. Miss Carr was driving there this afternoon when a big red motor car collided with her carriage, smashing the hind wheels. The chauffeur and the owner were profusely apologetic, and offered to make the damage immediately good, and to convey Miss Carr to the hospital. She accepted, and got into the car. The coachman brought the horse back to town and told the story. Wammell, one of my men, who was detailed to watch the Carr house, has just discovered that Miss Carr has not returned home; that she has not been to the hospital; in fact, has not been seen since she got into the red machine—and that is all! To put it frankly, they evidently thought that she had that precious ebony letter case, and have kidnapped her. That's the long and short of the matter. She has disappeared, flat, clean—and that's the end of it."

Redmayne loosened his collar and laughed—a bitter, ugly laugh. His hands went up, clenched.

"End of it!" he snarled. "End of it! End of hell! This is some work of Guido Conradi's—and it's only the beginning. I've got a friend to remember—a murdered friend—and now——"

His voice broke; his head bent.

"I love Miss Carr," he said, very simply. "And I shall find her and, if I can—I shall kill Guido Conradi!"

A paperweight fell heavily to the floor, and some papers scattered like white wings in air as he brought his clenched fist heavily down on Davison's table.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVING TO DO WITH THE COLOR OF MOTOR CARS.

The affair on the Tenallytown Pike had been conducted much as Wammell, the agent, had related it to Davison over the telephone. The collision had been, in all seemingness, a mere accident; and the man who alighted from the big touring car in company with his chauffeur had removed his cap and goggles, and had stood by Anne's side with most evident chagrin.

"How can I apologize for the carelessness of my driver?" he said abjectly. "I am so very, very sorry that mere words cannot express what I feel."

He was wrapped in a long bearskin coat, and had a well-shaped head, blue eyes, and light brown hair and mustache. He was very like a dozen other men she knew, and his intonation was that which she had been taught to expect from men of that sort.

"You're not hurt, I hope?" he added.

Anne had been saved from being thrown into the road by gripping the side of the victoria and clinging tightly to it. She was now standing in the road, holding her brown skirt free of the dust of the road. A brown plume waved about her dark hair from front to back of her hat; and her figure was very rounded and womanly in the snugly fitting fur coat she wore.

The man looked his admiration for a moment; but he quickly banished the look in favor of his former apologetic one.

"Of course I shall settle for the damage," he said. "That is the most trifling part of the occurrence. But the shock and discomfort to you—that I can never atone for!"

She glanced wanly toward her coachman who, with the assistance of the stranger's chauffeur, was quieting the much excited horses.

"I don't want to be too hard on you," said Anne. "Of course the thing was perfectly awful. You should discharge your driver and get one who can keep his eyes open—immediately. And I can see that it wasn't your fault."

He took out a bill roll and counted out ten twenty-dollar gold certificates. "If you will allow me—two hundred dollars," he said, placing them in her hands. "That will about pay for the repairs to the victoria."

"It is far too much," she said, handing back five of the notes. "The repairs cannot possibly come to more than one hundred."

He refused to take the notes. "I insist," he said. "If there is too much you can give the rest to your coachman, with my apologies for putting him to all this trouble. He will have to get the horses back to town somehow. I will drive on to the first farmhouse and have them send one of their hay wagons to cart the victoria back. But"—he paused hesitatingly—"if it is not too much of a liberty, I am rather concerned at leaving you here on the dusty road. You can't ride in a hay wagon, of course."

"I was going to Stoneham Hospital," she said. "I have a friend there who is very ill."

"Then won't you let me drive you there?" he asked eagerly. "I won't trouble you after that, I assure you. You can easily get a trap back from there. And after that I will attend to the hay wagon."

"That's very good of you," she said.

"Not at all. I'm trying to make amends. Get in, won't you?"

She stepped into the machine and spoke to her coachman, telling him that the gentleman would send a hay wagon for the mangled victoria, and that he was to wait there with the horses until it came.

"You may tell them at home, Jeff, that I have gone to the hospital to see

Miss Carnotti, and that I shall come back in a hired trap."

"Yassum, yaas, Miss Anne," replied the negro, shifting his grip on the horses' curbs, and casting venomous glances in the direction of the chauffeur, who had released the horses and was cranking up the machine.

In another minute Anne was whirling off down the road.

She was still pale; and the stranger, pushing up one of the compartments, took from a case a silver-mounted vinaigrette which he handed to her. "There," he said, "are some strong salts to brace you up. You need them after an accident like that."

She put the vinaigrette to her nostrils, and took a deep breath of the salts. So strong were they that for the moment all her senses were stunned; she neither breathed, saw, heard, nor felt; her actions became mechanical. Recovering her breath, she did not realize that she still held the smelling bottle to her nostrils, and took a second breath. A curious sickness overcame her. These were no salts in this bottle, but something they used in a hospital. She put out a weak hand; the vinaigrette dropped to the floor of the car. She turned her eyes to the man at her side.

"Your salts—are—strange——" she breathed.

A curious desire to sleep came over her; she struggled against it, but her eyelids closed in spite of her mental effort; and with the closing of her eyes her muscular tension relaxed. She lost the feeling of sickness. It seemed that she had been transported to her home, that it was nightfall, and that the cool sheets of her bed were drawn down. Now her head touched the pillow, and she breathed a sigh of relief. She could sleep now, since she was at home. She took a deep breath and composed herself to slumber, her head sinking on the man's shoulder.

"Third speed ahead," called the man to the driver. "It's all right."

The driver's other hand shot out; something clicked; and the motor plunged ahead without regard for the speed laws. Spurting uphill, rumbling downhill, creaking over a suspension bridge, scaring horses and pedestrians, the big machine flashed like a red streak. The man put one hand about Anne's waist, and held her unconscious body tightly, that she might not slip; and now, when they had quite left the beaten track for a disused path through a marsh, he touched the driver on the shoulder again.

"Drive straight through those bushes there, and under those big oak trees."

The machine bounded over the marshy ground and crashed among alder bushes and willows, then came to a stop under a great oak tree, completely hidden from the road by the masses of undergrowth, bushes, and trees.

The chauffeur descended and removed his goggles, revealing the pointed mustache and wisp of imperial that went with the make-up of Yves, the Frenchman. From a leather case which he took from his motor coat he extracted a cigarette, and handed the case to the other man.

"For you, *mon ami.*"

The other followed his example, and both stood at the side of the machine, looking at the pale face of the unconscious girl, her body heaving in her drugged sleep, little tendrils of her silky, wavy hair blowing about her face under the veil she wore.

"Good-looking, very!" remarked the first man.

"*Oui*—of a certainty," replied Yves. "But this to remind you, Paul, that we are not here to admire her beauty. Yes?"

The other smiled brightly on him. "You are right, Yves—right, as usual." He drew back and puffed on his cigarette, looking up at the interlaced branches of the trees through which the sun shot an occasional gleam, lighting up the face of the drugged girl.

"And now," he said, "for the famous exhibition of hypnotic suggestion, as manifested by the renowned Monsieur Yves, of Paris, London, Berlin and Sur-la-mer, who has performed before the crowned heads of Europe, Asia, Africa and America."

"Omit the drivel," was Yves' comment. He stepped to the girl's side and, turning her head, unpinned the veil from the back and lifted it over her brown hat. "You imagine that there is some jest in the matter—eh?"

He passed his fingers lightly over the girl's forehead.

"Oh, I know well enough we can get the ebony letter case out of her people as the price of her ransom," replied the other. "And I suppose we can scare her into giving us a note to her people telling them to surrender the case. But as for this suggestion business—oh, hell!—if you will pardon the solecism."

"Look at her now," commanded Yves.

Color had come back to the girl's cheeks, and she was breathing regularly instead of stertorously.

Yves still caressed her forehead with his long white fingers.

"She's coming out of the drug," was the other's remark.

"Nonsense! It is good for four hours. No—she is responding to my will. See her now."

The girl's lips parted in a curve, showing two little teeth.

"Now," said Yves.

He pressed his fingers tightly to her forehead, and, leaning over, whispered in her ear: "Where is the ebony letter case?"

The lips moved slightly, forming indistinct murmurs. Yves pressed his fingers harder against the forehead, and drew them across until two red stains showed on the white.

"This is Bianca. She wants her ebony letter case. What have you done with it, Anne?"

Still only the murmurs.

"The ebony letter case. Bianca wants to know where it is. It is not yours. Bianca needs it. Where is it, Anne?"

This time the lips formed words. "I—I—gave it——"

The other man came closer, amazed, studying the girl's face and glancing at that of Yves, which was pale and compressed, the blue veins standing out against his forehead, his eyes closed, his fingers trembling.

"You gave the ebony letter case to some one. Tell Bianca who it was? She needs her ebony letter case."

"Gave it—to Mr.——" The exasperating murmurs again.

"You gave it to Mr. —— who, dear? Your brother, Mr. Carr? Did you give it to him?"

"No, not to Hal——"

"Then to whom?"

Yves' fingers seemed to be making dents in her flesh; the other man suddenly expostulated and turned away.

"To whom—to whom, dear?"

"Oh, you hurt! Let—me—sleep!"

"But tell Bianca where the ebony letter case is. You gave it away. You gave it to a man. What man?"

"Mr.—Red—mayne——"

Yves took away his fingers and stood up, very white, with beads of perspiration trickling down his pallid forehead. The girl's head sank back to the cushions, showing the ugly red marks on her temples where Yves' fingers had pressed. She lost her even breathing, and became stertorous again.

"You see, Paul Shackleford, that there is something in my hypnotic suggestion—eh?"

Shackleford nodded. "Bully work!" he said. "Sorry you had to hurt the girl as you did. It seems such a shame, though. In fact, the whole thing is pretty low and rotten, if you ask me; and not such a lot in it, after all."

"Your share alone should be over a hundred thousand francs, *mon ami!*"

Shackleford laughed. "That sounds well enough—in francs; but kindly do it over again in dollars, and then reduce it to pounds, and it doesn't sound like such a lot. So you think they'll pay half a million francs for that letter case, eh?"

"I think nothing about it, *mon ami.* I *know* they will pay as much as they can. And they can pay half a million francs, and we shall insist on that—a hundred thousand francs apiece, eh? More, maybe!"

Shackleford glanced at his watch. "You've got two to bid against each other. The dowager and Boris—it is worth much more than that to either.

To him it means a possible crown; to the dowager—but we waste time. One of us must go back to Washington, and, *cher* Yves, as there is a very pretty fellow watching industriously for you ever since you gave him the slip by going through the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance of the Hollis and making your exit by F Street where I picked you up, I think I'd better be the man to interview Mr. Redmayne. Not that I am in love with the task. He should be an awkward customer—very! Somewhat of an athlete, to judge from his standing as an oar and a centre rush. Not very particular who he kills, either—if you remember his record in Juimaras when he helped put Castilio into the dictatorship."

He took off his motor coat, cap and gauntlets, and tossed them into the machine.

"To judge from poor Conradi also," remarked Yves. "He emptied a couple of shots into his body and wrenched his shoulder loose. He can't shoot very well though, I should imagine."

"Blinded with rage," said Shackleford, with a laugh. "He shoots well enough."

He took a soft gray hat from a basket, and turned it up in front. It harmonized well with his smartly cut suit of gray tweeds. From the pocket of his coat he took a pair of walking gloves of gray suède, which he drew on and buttoned. Then he donned a lighter coat which he took from the basket.

"Pity we didn't know Redmayne had them at first," he said. "Now I suppose my lay is to threaten Miss Carr's life unless he gives the case up. Pity I don't look more bloodthirsty. He probably won't believe me."

He waved a gray-gloved hand to Yves. "So-long!" he said, and plunged through the alder bushes.

Yves, left alone, pondered for a while, then took from the basket two cans of prepared paint and several brushes. It was a new sort of paint, which dried quickly and was generally applied for waterproofing purposes. It was not intended to be permanent.

He threw off coat and waistcoat, rolled up his sleeves, and painted the tonneau of the car, the axles, the spokes of the wheels, and the outside body—every part, in fact, that showed a trace of red. Finished, he surveyed his handiwork with some approval; and, making a good fire of twigs, he burned the paint cans and the brushes.

"Julian probably never supposed that his scholar would ever apply academy technique to a job like this," he soliloquized, as he watched the paint dry in the sun, turning the machine to a beautiful dove gray. The stuff had been applied with neatness, and there was nothing in the car's appearance to lead one to suppose that it had ever been anything but gray in color.

Presently he covered the sleeping body of Anne with the heavy coat which Shackleford had discarded; then, replenishing the fire and settling himself against a tree, he took from his pocket a volume of Theophile Gautier and a box of French caporals. Smoking and reading, and occasionally pacing up and down when the chill of the late winter air oppressed him, he passed the afternoon until he saw the sun peeping at him like a great eye from behind the hills. Then, discarding Gautier and the caporals, he cranked up the machine, climbed into it, wary of the wet paint, and threw the lap-robe across the seats, so that there was no sign of the red cushion. Placing Anne gently on the floor of the machine under the robe, he pulled the lever and took the steering wheel; after which he crashed through the willows and alders again, crossed the swampy land, and emerged on the pike.

He let the machine go at the first speed, quite casually; and the gray car, harmonizing with the dusk, was hardly observed by those whom it chanced to pass. If they did observe it, it was only to note that it was a gray affair, much like any other, with the regulation European chauffeur in coat, cap, goggles, and pointed mustache.

And this was why the county constables, Secret Service men, and special officers of the Washington police inter-

rogated people in vain as to the passing of a great red machine with two men and a girl in it.

CHAPTER VII.

SCOUNDREL, BUT NOT BLACKGUARD.

Redmayne left Davison's office, sullenly determined to have no more to do with the Secret Service bureau in settling the affair in hand. He would settle it after his own methods, and in his own way. There had been nothing but disappointment in the methods of Davison's men, and the police, if possible, were worse.

First of all, Yves' trail had been lost. Jasper, the man detailed to watch him, had to report that he had entered the New Hollis Hotel and had gone below to the grillroom, where he had ordered lunch. Yves had given no sign of being aware of Jasper's surveillance, nor had he made any attempt to shake off the Secret Service man's watchful eye. He ordered leisurely from the bill of fare, and then gazed regretfully at his hands, asking the waiter the way to the lavatory. He had gone there, leaving his hat, coat, and stick behind him. Jasper was seated several tables away; he saw nothing suspicious in a man going to wash his hands, particularly as he left his traps behind. But when much time passed and Yves did not return—when the waiter arrived with the luncheon and still there was no Yves—Jasper became concerned, and went in search of him. He found, to his astonishment and chagrin, that a gentleman without coat or hat had gone out on the F Street side and had entered a red touring car, which had driven off immediately. The porter had not particularly remarked the man in the car, supposing him to be the gentleman's chauffeur; and, had he done so, he would have seen nothing save a fur coat and cap and a pair of goggles.

So from this Redmayne gained only the knowledge that Yves had escaped in time to assist in the hold-up and kidnapping of Anne Carr.

Falconer, the man set to watch Alleyne, had better luck in keeping track of his man; but found nothing of Conradi's whereabouts. Alleyne had breakfasted at the club, played billiards until lunch, taken lunch with a wealthy scion of a New York family, and spent the afternoon with him. Such business as Alleyne had to do was evidently consummated by telegraph and telephone.

As for Guido Conradi, he had disappeared as mysteriously as was possible. His rooms were in good order, and showed no signs of a hasty exit; most of his clothes and effects were there; but no papers, books, or anything that would give the slightest trace of his whereabouts. Yves' rooms were subjected to a like scrutiny; and Alleyne's chambers, also. But absolutely nothing of importance had been gleaned.

The motor car belonging to the Secret Service was already in commission, with two of Davison's men in charge; and two more on motor cycles were already at the place where Anne had been held up. Interrogation of Jeff, Anne's coachman, had brought no identification save that the chauffeur wore a mustache. As for the rest, he only remembered the usual goggles, tan coats, and visored caps usually worn by those who motored.

Redmayne telephoned to his chauffeur from Davison's office to put his car into light working order, to examine it thoroughly for defects, and to provision it for a week's run, carrying four extra tires, the entire repair outfit, food, a spirit stove, and other necessaries; and to go to Diogenes and get some things in a bag. Once in his machine, he made up his mind to keep on the track of Anne until he found her; and, if possible, to kill Guido Conradi for his murder of Caspar and his outrageous treatment of the girl.

He walked hastily back to his H Street house, and reached it as it was growing dusk. Diogenes met him with a written slip.

"A gentleman waiting to see you, sir."

Diogenes further affirmed on paper that he had not seen the gentleman before.

Redmayne entered his sitting room, and Paul Shackleford arose to greet him. There was in Redmayne's mind a faint recollection of having seen the man before, but he was unable to place him. He viewed him carefully and decided that he was one of his own sort—in appearance and manners, at least.

"Mr. Redmayne?" said Shackleford. "I am sorry to intrude myself upon you in this way. But I thought I might possibly be of some assistance to you."

"Assistance to me—in what, if you please?" Redmayne's tone was not particularly encouraging.

His visitor took a cigarette from a silver case; but Redmayne forestalled him by handing over a tin box of Turkish cigarettes, made by his own tobacconist particularly to his taste.

"Try these," he suggested.

"Thanks!" The visitor carefully replaced the one he had withdrawn, and took one of Redmayne's. Both lighted; they eyed one another.

"Have a whisky and soda—or anything?" asked Redmayne.

He pushed a cut glass decanter and a seltzer siphon across the table to the other. Paul Shackleford mixed a drink; so did Redmayne.

"Now," suggested Redmayne, "you said you thought you could be of assistance to me. Won't you be a trifle clearer?"

"With pleasure. I have just learned the regrettable instance of Miss Anne Carr's kidnapping. I hear you wish to find her—and I put myself at your service."

Redmayne put down his glass and stared at him. The vague suspicion had crystallized.

"So?" he said grimly. "You were the go-between, eh?"

"I misunderstand you," replied the other blandly.

"Come down to points. You know where Miss Carr is?"

The other shook his head.

"You can find out?"

"Possibly!"

"Ah!"

Redmayne carefully poured his whisky and soda into a brass cuspidor at his feet. Shackleford, noting the significance of the action, flushed and picked up his own glass. He was about to empty it after Redmayne's, but suddenly changed his mind, smiled, and drank it.

"You're nothing on earth but a dirty blackmailer!" said Redmayne, in an ugly tone.

Paul Shackleford shrugged his shoulders. "I'll tell you this, Mr. Redmayne," he said evenly; "I'm too much concentrated on my end to be annoyed by your insults."

Redmayne laughed in a peculiarly vicious way he had when angry. "Insults! One can't insult a person like you—it's impossible. One only tells the truth mildly."

Shackleford leaned across in his chair. "The point in question is, however, whether or not you want to bring Miss Carr back to Washington alive and well—isn't it?"

"You blackguard! If you dare——"

"Pooh! No histrionics, please. I'm an agent. I have nothing to do with this matter. But I can tell you this. Miss Carr doesn't get back home until you surrender that ebony letter case to me—and if you give warning against me she doesn't get home at all. Now you can suit yourself as to your line of action."

"I shan't give you the letter case, if that's what you mean," said Redmayne.

"Very well, then." Paul Shackleford arose. "You don't value Miss Carr's life at very much, do you?" He made toward the door.

Redmayne, with an oath, sprang at him.

Shackleford put one hand into the pocket of his lounging coat, facing Redmayne very calmly.

"I've got you sighted," he remarked; and Redmayne could see the outlines of a revolver showing against the thin gray cloth of Shackleford's suit.

"You——" he began.

"Oh, cut it, Mr. Redmayne!" Shackleford advised, in a tired tone. "I haven't any desire to use the weapon, but I simply indicate its presence, to show you that I don't intend to submit

to any manhandling on your part. Now, see here—be sensible, why don't you? We've got Miss Carr, and we haven't any intention of releasing her until we get that ebony letter case. I don't mind telling you very frankly that we had no idea that you had the case. We expected that she had hidden it somewhere in her apartments, and simply thought to find the hiding place from her and go and get it."

"Burglary, eh?" sneered Redmayne.

"With the consent of the parties concerned? Hardly! Or we thought perhaps she had entrusted it to her brother or some one in the family who would willingly give it up where the welfare of one they loved was concerned. But, of course, in your case, taking no interest in Miss Carr, I suppose it hardly matters to you what happens, eh?"

"You keep your suppositions to yourself, my man!"

"Well, now——" Shackleford again seated himself and crossed his legs. "Now I ask you again to be sensible. This ebony letter case does not concern you, can have no interest for you. It is a matter into which you have stumbled blindfold. Of what avail is it for you to keep the letter case? You cannot open it, in the first place; for you do not know the secret manner of doing so. If you try to force it open, the revolving screw will tear the contents to shreds. So, holding it as you do, you are handicapped. I only ask you to give it to me—and Miss Carr will be allowed to return home safe and sound. If not——" He finished with a shrug.

Redmayne lighted another cigarette and smoked it rapidly, taking whiff after whiff until the paper tube became too hot to hold.

"The case," he said slowly, "was the property of my very good friend, Captain von Zuehohn. To obtain it, your accomplice Guido Conradi killed him."

Shackleford waved his hand.

"That was very unfortunate," he allowed. "Conradi had no intention of so doing. He simply wished to render him unconscious."

"You admit he killed him, then?"

"Were you not already fully convinced that he did?" asked Shackleford. "And, had I denied it, you would not have believed me. No—it's well to be perfectly straight in these matters."

"Very well," said Redmayne. "After delivering the case to Miss Carnotti, Conradi found that she had grown tired of plots and had warned my friend. He came back to get the case. As a consequence, Miss Carnotti is in a hospital with concussion of the brain, Miss Carr is maltreated and insulted by Conradi, and I am wounded—as you see?"

"Conradi had nothing to do with Miss Carnotti's accident. As for the wound to you, that was in self-defense. I admit the insult and maltreating of Miss Carr, most especially the insult; but—you know the Italian temperament. But that is aside from the point. You gain nothing by holding the case, and you seriously injure Miss Carr by allowing her to remain our prisoner. Conradi is—to be frank—quite smitten with her!" He lifted his eyebrows.

"You precious rascal!" said Redmayne.

"Admitted frankly. But that does not help matters any, does it? The question is—do you or do you not surrender the case?"

Redmayne meditated. They plainly had him at odds. Miss Carr had entrusted the case to him for safe keeping; but would she have told these men that he held it unless she were put to some very severe pressure which made her anxious to be released? The thought ran through him like fire. They must have threatened her vilely for her to have told them that the case was in his possession. She wished to be free, and wanted him to give up the case.

He decided quickly. He would surrender the case, but would set Diogenes to following the man. Diogenes would discover the whereabouts of the plotters; and when they had set Anne free, he, Redmayne, would be at liberty to go there—to have it out with Guido Conradi, man to man; to regain the ebony letter case, and to play quits for the death of Caspar von Zuehohn and the insult to the girl.

He faced Shackleford. "I will give

you the case," he said. "But I must go into the next room and get it out of my safe."

He paused. "What assurance have I that Miss Carr will be set free when I give you the case?"

"Well," said Shackleford frankly, "I suppose my promise isn't worth a rap to you."

"Not a rap!"

"And my word of honor doesn't count for much more?"

"It counts for *no* more."

"My oath isn't much better?"

"It isn't *any* better."

"Don't know that I blame you," sighed Shackleford, smiling. "But, really, I haven't anything else to give, unless it is the plea of common sense. Why should we seek to retain Miss Carr after we have got the letter case, when she very plainly desires to be quit of us? How does that appeal to you?"

"But you said—that Guido Conradi had——"

"Had taken a fancy to her—quite so. See here, Mr. Redmayne; I'm an American, and I play fair with women. I should have a row with my friends if they really threatened harm to Miss Carr, and should probably be buried very quietly with a knife-thrust in the back. I was hoping to settle this affair peaceably, because, if you refuse to give me the case, I shall probably land in trouble with my friends in defending Miss Carr. That's the flat of it—and you can take it or believe it just as you choose. I'm a bad lot, and a professional adventurer—but I never harmed a woman yet, and don't intend to begin."

There was a short silence, after which Redmayne poured out some whisky and pushed the decanter across to Shackleford.

"You mean——"

"I mean," said Redmayne, "that I'm eternally forgetting that no man is any more utterly bad than another can be utterly good. And I'm sorry I insulted you by pouring out my drink a few minutes before. You're a blackmailer, there's no doubt of it—a rascal, and a scoundrel—but you're not a blackguard, and here's my apology."

They drank to each other. Shackleford thanked him.

"I'm sorry to be on the wrong side of you, Mr. Redmayne. If I weren't in need of money continually, I think I'd be decent—and we might be friends. We're from the same college, you know—only I was a senior while you were in prep school. I shan't tell you the name my classmates know me by, and the one the police have is so notorious that I shan't tell you that either. And now—will you fetch the case?"

It had grown dark, and Redmayne switched on the electric lights.

"Wait here. I'll fetch it," he said.

He went into his dressing room, untwirled the combination lock, and took out the case. Turning to his desk, he wrote briefly on a slip of paper instructions for Diogenes, ringing for his servant the while. The heavy oaken door was closed between him and Paul Shackleford; and he knew that the conspirator could not hear the noiseless footstep of Diogenes or the ringing to his room, two flights up in the attic, where Diogenes pored over newspapers and periodicals when not engaged in serving his master.

When Diogenes appeared, the written slip Redmayne handed him gave him succinct information, and Redmayne's finger to lip warned him to be still. Diogenes read the slip.

Follow the man when he leaves the house. Do not return until you have discovered where Miss Carr is hidden. Go immediately downstairs and wait on the other side of the street. The man suspects watchers. Do not give him the chance to consider you one. Particularly remember not to return until you have found where Miss Carr is hidden.

Along with the slip Redmayne had thrust in his hand five hundred-dollar bills for contingent expenses.

Diogenes' eyes flashed intelligence, and he disappeared noiselessly from the room. When he had gone, Redmayne locked the safe and went back to Shackleford, the case in his hand.

"Here it is," he said.

Shackleford thanked him and put it into his pocket.

"Miss Carr will be sent home to-morrow morning," he said. "Good-by, Mr. Redmayne."

Redmayne smiled as the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

Diogenes had not gone immediately to the street. Bounding upward to the attic with the fleetness of a deer, he had rushed into his bedroom, taken a pair of scissors from his bureau and, without the slightest hesitation, although with considerable regret, snipped his side whiskers off, leaving only the appearance of a man unshaven on either side of the face. It required only an instant more to get into a black overcoat and a black derby hat. Taking one glance at himself in the mirror, he was filled with regret that he could not shave away the places where the whiskers had been; but that was impossible, and he knew it. He went downstairs and across the street, and walked slowly toward the corner.

He had removed the whiskers for the very simple reason that the average man does not wear side whiskers, and, if his quarry were to see a side-whiskered man too often, he would begin to suspect. But a mere shrimp of a man, undersized and anæmic, in black coat and derby, was a familiar sight to every one. No one ever looked twice at Diogenes. He was not worth the attention—from a physical standpoint, at least.

He turned at the corner, and came back in time to see Shackleford emerge from the house and go down the street. Diogenes waited until he had passed him; then switched his course again, and followed in the adventurer's wake. Shackleford glanced about him several times with considerable uneasiness; but there were a number of people passing and repassing, and Diogenes was simply one of many in his eyes.

At the corner of Fourteenth Street he espied a four-wheeler, and hailed it. Diogenes, without the slightest hesitation, ran after the four-wheeler and "caught on behind," as the street boys term this peculiar mode of locomotion —which is to say that Diogenes flattened himself between the body of the cab and the rear axle, and went through a series of bumps and jolts that caused his stomach to feel quite queer and shaky. Fortunately it was dark, with no one to notice the small figure crouched in the uncomfortable position, and no policeman able to observe and to hale the offender before a magistrate.

The address that Shackleford gave had been indistinct, and Diogenes had not caught it. He only knew that the cab jolted across New York Avenue and down G Street, where it proceeded as far as Eighth Street.

"Here's your number, sir," called down the cabman.

Shackleford called back to him: "Changed my mind. Drive me to the Carnegie Library."

The cab turned up Eighth Street and back to New York Avenue, where it landed the fare at the corner of Seventh Street.

"Carnegie Library, sir," called the driver.

Shackleford got out, paid the extortionate fee without murmuring, and went into the library grounds, not glancing behind him. Diogenes freed himself from his cramped position and went into a barber shop just across the way. He was a frequenter of the library, and knew that there was only one means of entrance and exit after seven o'clock in the evening; and that was exactly overlooked by the first chair of the barber shop where he took a seat, after taking off his dusty coat to be brushed.

He indicated his unshaven sideboards, and made signs for the barber to make haste.

The entrance to the library grounds was guarded by two great electric bulbs, and any one passing under them was plainly visible.

Shackleford did not come out during the time that Diogenes remained in the barber shop. Diogenes paid his fee and

took himself off to the other side of the street, keeping a close eye on the library entrance. Presently Shackleford came out and took a Seventh Street car south. So did Diogenes, who installed himself on the rear seat.

Shackleford transferred at F Street and got off at the railroad station. Diogenes was immediately behind him when he bought a ticket for Laurel, Maryland.

When Shackleford had gone out of the waiting room to the platform, Diogenes, who had stood carelessly by, pushed across the ticket seller's counter a written request for a ticket to Laurel. He had a narrow shave in catching his train, swinging aboard just as the last car was pulling out. It did not prove to be the one containing Shackleford; but to be aboard the train was the main thing.

He remained in his seat in the chair coach for a while; then argued quite plausibly that it was to be supposed that Shackleford had gone into the smoking car. Diogenes betook himself to that part of the train, and seated himself. Shackleford was not among those present. Uneasiness stirred in Diogenes' breast as he wondered whether the taking of the ticket to Laurel could have been only a blind. He did not dare to go into the next coach, for fear that Shackleford would remember the man who stood next him at the ticket office.

He waited, smoking one of Redmayne's excellent cigars without being able to appreciate the bouquet of it, so perturbed was he. It was half gone before the train stopped at the first way station. Diogenes raised his window and craned out to see if Shackleford had alighted. The only passenger who disembarked was a lame woman with a carryall; so he drew his head in. At that moment Shackleford came into the car and sat down.

Diogenes had shrunk up into a little bundle in his seat; and Shackleford's glance about the coach did not connect the shriveled, clean-shaven man with the suave, side-whiskered servant who had conducted him into Redmayne's apartments. He took out his cigarette case and lighted one of the paper tubes.

It was a "way train"—a commuters' train—on which they had embarked; and it drew up at every station on the route between Washington and Baltimore. But none of them seemed to afford any interest to Shackleford, who placidly smoked cigarette after cigarette and read the magazine which he had bought at the news stand previously to taking the train. Diogenes had a timetable on which he checked off the various stations that they passed; and he now found that they had only two stations to pass before Laurel. They reached one marked "Lauderdale," and Shackleford arose and sauntered out of the smoking car.

Diogenes had a sudden premonition; he went out of the other door and descended to the platform of the station. Some baggage men and track hands were standing in a group near by; he joined them. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the train beginning to move; the cars were slowly passing him. He had almost determined to catch the rail and swing on again, when a man stepped lightly to the platform, and the train swung out of the station.

Diogenes had taken long chances. It was very dark on the platform, rendering it impossible to identify his quarry or any one else. He could not follow him too closely, for fear of suspicion. He saw Shackleford go into the station master's office; and he waited outside, sitting on a truck. Through the window he saw Shackleford in the telephone booth.

The night was beautifully clear, and a trifle cold. Diogenes wrapped himself up tighter in his overcoat, and shivered on the cold truck. A single gasoline lamp flickered in the station master's office, where the station master—who was also telegrapher, baggage master and track superintendent—clicked the keys of his instrument in answer to signals from the train dispatcher's office in Washington.

The tracks ran between hills at Lauderdale, and Diogenes could see a sheer clay bank rising upward by the light of

the two extra gasoline lanterns that swung over the penthouse of the station, close to the signboard that showed the name. On the upper reaches of the clay bank grew elder bushes, thorn trees, saplings, pine and walnut trees, clear of their leaves—save for the evergreens—and showing frostily naked with the hoar and rime of winter, the pines standing out as distinct color notes of green against the white. To the left of the station and on the same side of the tracks a road wound up among the foothills; and here and there Diogenes could see a few lights winking out of the clear night.

Diogenes shivered again. Glancing inside the office, he saw that Shackleford had put down the telephone receiver and was gazing intently out into the night. Diogenes thanked the cold stars overhead that the truck hid him from view. He remained as still and as silent as an inanimate being.

Some ten minutes passed before the rattle of an aged vehicle resounded on the road, and a man pulled up a rusty gig on the left-hand side of the platform, restraining without any particular difficulty a very Methuselah of quadrupeds, wall-eyed and downcast in his demeanor, spavined and apparently knock-kneed, which only an inherited respect for natural history classifications would impel any one to call a horse.

But the sight of it seemed to bring great joy to Shackleford, who came out of the station master's office in a great hurry, jumped into the rusty gig, and requested the driver thereof to make haste. The man spat speculatively and eyed the ancient quadruped; then encouraged her with a chirp and a "Gee up thar, Annabel!"

The wall-eyed one turned a reproachful eye upon him, and ambled off aimlessly, presently drawing the gig and the two men around a turn in the road.

Diogenes, knowing that inquiries were much better left to his master, went into the station master's office, indicated himself to be dumb, and waved his hand toward the telegraph blanks. The station master, huge-limbed and in shirt sleeves, with waistcoat unbuttontoned, pushed the blanks toward him with a wave of the hand indicating vast hospitality. Diogenes wrote a telegram to Redmayne:

> Come immediately in machine Lauderdale. Way station. No time waste. Located probably person wanted. DIOGENES.

He handed this to the station master, and scrawled over it, in huge letters: "Urgent!"

"You want this sent at urgent rates, brother?" asked the station master.

Diogenes nodded.

"It's a-going to cost money."

Redmayne's servant allowed him to glimpse five hundred-dollar bills which he held fanwise in his hand, as a poker player might hold a royal straight flush —with the missing ace concealed in the form of a deuce.

The station master eyed him first with respect, then with suspicion. "Ain't you got nothing smaller?"

Diogenes exhibited several dollar bills, as though to inquire whether the amount were sufficient.

The station master calculated. "Yep," he replied. "Let's have her."

He put the message on the wire, to the exclusion of all other business; for telegrams sent at urgent rates are things for which the telegraph companies have much respect. The Washington operator having signified the receipt of the message and repeated it for Lauderdale's verification, the station master shut down his transmitting key and regarded Diogenes.

"This place seems to be gettin' popular with folks having more money than brains," he was good enough to remark. "Jest had another one of your kind in here a-telephoning fer a rig to take him up-country. And yesterday a man come down from thet same place and got me to flag an express train fer some reason —God knows what. Guess he had ter settle pretty handsome with the conductor fer it—— Oh, drat that ticker!"

For the clicking of the Morse instrument had interrupted his flow of loquacity; and when he would have resumed his monologue he found that Diogenes had dropped quietly off to

sleep. With a disgusted look, he picked up a copy of the county paper and regaled himself with announcements anent the newly painted fences of his acquaintances.

Nearly an hour passed, during which time Diogenes slept quite peacefully. An express train hurtled toward Baltimore without deigning to notice Lauderdale. The station master had passed out of the room to the platform, and was standing near the signboard, emitting snorts of boredom. The hooting of an automobile horn awoke him to interest; and he peered out into the night, eyes and ears keenly alert. Taking one of the lanterns from the signboard he waved it invitingly to and fro, and presently the puffing of a machine drawing up on the right-hand side of the platform was accompanied by the sight of a white touring car in which sat four men, muffled in overcoats. One of these threw off the lap robe and sprang out upon the platform.

"Is there a man here—a man with side whiskers, and dumb?" he asked.

The station master answered. "Do you be Mr. Redmayne?" he wished to know, remembering the telegram sent at urgent rates.

"Yes," replied the owner of that name impatiently. "Is my servant here?"

"If you mean the man what sent that telegram—yes, he's here. An' he's dumb, all right—but I ain't seen no side whiskers."

"Where is he?" demanded Redmayne.

The other three men had left the car now. One was Redmayne's chauffeur, Adams; the second, Davison; the third, Lieutenant Marriott, of the army, a close friend of Redmayne's who had recently returned from the Philippines. Redmayne had his car in readiness when the telegram came; and immediately on receipt of it had driven to Davison's house and to Marriott's apartments. The car had made good time; and the four men, armed each with a brace of revolvers, were ready for the end of the Carnotti mystery and the affair of the Von Zuehohn murder.

The station master led the way to his office, and Redmayne awoke the sleeping Diogenes, who took out a piece of paper and pencil, and explained how he had followed Shackleford to Lauderdale without having been seen, and how Shackleford had taken a gig up-country. Also he wrote that it appeared to be quite safe to assume that the hiding place of the conspirators had been found.

Redmayne turned to the station master. "You remember the man who telephoned for the gig?" he asked.

"Sure," replied the station master.

"Well—where was it?" asked Redmayne impatiently.

The station master surveyed him calmly. "See here, stranger," he averred, "I don't know thet you've hired me to set here and answer your questions. If you hev, it's news to me. And, seein's that's the case, don't act like I was paid so much a week by you."

"Look here, my good man," said Redmayne impatiently, "if you want any money out of this, just name what it is, and you can have it. We want you to help us find that man who telephoned, and we're willing to do whatever you say."

"Don't want your money, mister, and I'm perfectly willing to tell you all I know. That was one of the parties that hev hired the old Gilman mansion up thar on Sycamore Hill." He waved his hand toward the clayey path which the gig had taken. "I ain't even heard the old Gilman house was rented till yesterday when a man come down from thar and flagged the express and nearly got me inter a bunch of trouble. Then, this afternoon, I seen a big gray autoemobeel come a-rushin' past, and I guess them was the parties. And then this gent comes here to-night and telephones over to Simpson Carker to bring down his gig and drive him up thar."

"The old Gilman house, eh?" said Davison. "And how do you get there?"

"Well," reflected the station master, "it's a pretty curious kind of a way, and I guess you couldn't find it for yourselves. But if you wanter, you can telephone over to Simpson Carker; he's

got the general store over to Lauderdale village, and he'll come down and steer you over. Guess he's got back from driving that other stranger over. What be you, anyhow—detectives? Is they a bunch of counterfeiters—hey?"

Davison smiled. "We'll tell you about that when we come back. As for telephoning to Mr. Carker, I guess we can find his store without that—can't we? We'll pick him up and take him with us—eh?"

"That's purty good," agreed the station master. "I clean forgot you had your machine. You jest keep to that road over thar, and it'll land you right in front of Simp's store. Don't fergit to stop on your way back and tell me all erbout it, will you?"

They promised, and got into the machine. The acetylene lamps threw a flood of light ahead; and they proceeded at the second speed, with only a few jolts and bumps to swear over, until they drew up in a sort of irregular square between two small hills, where some frame houses were scattered at intervals, one of which, long and low, proved to be Simpson Carker's store.

Carker sat in his gig with the ancient quadruped, and, leaning from it, talked to some of the natives, cowhide-booted and blue-jeaned.

Redmayne had the machine brought up to his side, when Diogenes had identified him. The aged horse sniffed suspiciously, then relapsed into its accustomed condition of languidness.

"You're Mr. Carker—eh?" asked Redmayne.

Carker admitted it. "And who be you?" he wished to know.

"We want you to take us up to the old Gilman house." Redmayne leaned over and thrust a bill into his hand. "We're in a hurry. Just climb into the machine and tell the chauffeur where to take us. Hurry—if you don't mind!"

Carker crawled deliberately from his vehicle and turned over the reins to one of the blue-jeaned ones, with the injunction to mind Annabel's head. Annabel looked up at the mention of her name, sadly, reproachfully, and emitted a sound that, coming from a more youthful horse, might have been called a neigh.

The machine passed out of the light of the gasoline lamps, and on to the road again.

"Straight ahead, Mr. Shoffer," directed Carker from his post at Adams' feet; and the machine took the hill and disappeared over its crest from the view of the inhabitants of Lauderdale, who had turned out *en masse* to watch the glorious Elijah-like exit of Mr. Simpson Carker.

The machine was crowded to its capacity. Beside the chauffeur sat Diogenes; at his feet, Carker; while the rear seat had great difficulty in holding Davison, Marriott, and Redmayne. Soon after the car started, Redmayne thrust into Diogenes' hand a revolver, which the servant handled with such loving care that Mr. Simpson Carker felt suddenly as though he were willing to forego the pleasures of riding in princely fashion.

Down the hill, they struck a level space for the better part of a mile; and were then side-switched by Carker into a narrow path that barely held the machine's body. This led along a mill race, and Carker explained it to be a short cut to the Gilman house. It was with the greatest difficulty that Adams kept the car's nose straight along the very precarious path; and when they emerged into a clearing and upon a very wide and very muddy forest road, he was glad, for the sake of his reputation as a chauffeur and the welfare of his employer and his friends, that the mill-race path had not been longer.

The forest road, Mr. Simpson Carker informed them, led directly to the rear entrance of the old Gilman house grounds. Adams let the machine go cautiously; for the road was full of ruts and broken limbs of trees, not to mention innumerable huge stones. After fifteen minutes of jolting and bumping, Carker advised the bringing of the machine to a halt. He had already been informed that they wished to enter the Gilman house secretly; and it was for this reason that he deemed further progress inadvisable.

They left the machine in charge of Adams, and stumbled after Carker, the mud clinging to their boots like glue, and making progress almost impossible. Redmayne produced an electric torch which he handed to Carker, with instructions to keep out of sight of any onlookers from the Gilman house.

They climbed a broken fence and let themselves down on some grassy sod on the other side. Tall trees enveloped them, free of leaves, stark and staring in their frosty majesty. A couple of crows sailed athwart a moonlit space between the opening left by some broken limbs. With the reappearance of the moon, the country was spread out before them like a landscape done in blue and silver—leafless trees, drooping shrubs and bushes, hedges, hills beyond; and, looming on a slight incline, a great bulk of a house, with no light visible.

By Carker's advice they kept close to the hedges, screening themselves from sight, and worked their way around to the rear entrance of the house. The shutters were closed; but, now that they stood near, they could see faint gleams of yellow light escaping from some of the windows. They reached the servants' entrance, and Carker indicated it in a hoarse whisper as a possible means of egress.

The door was, as might have been expected, locked. Davison soon remedied that by producing a huge bunch of skeleton keys, collected from among the effects of the many criminals in whose downfall he had taken a hand. It took a number of trials before one was found that would do the work; and then the door opened gratingly. They trooped into the dark kitchen on tiptoe, each with a revolver in his right hand.

They pushed the door shut, not troubling to catch the lock for fear of possible noise; then, with Redmayne in the lead, they crossed the kitchen and filed into the servants' hall. It led them to the main dining room, through the keyholes of which they could note yellow lights. Davison and Diogenes took up their stand at this door, with revolvers ready, while Redmayne and Marriott slipped up the back stairway.

The stairs creaked, and the hearts of both men were in their mouths as they followed Carker to the second landing and across it; then down the front stairs and back to the front entrance of the dining room. Carker indicated the door, and slipped backward into the shadows. With a sudden movement, Redmayne threw open the door and stepped within, his revolver covering the occupants of the room. Behind him came Marriott, with a revolver in each hand.

Three men started to their feet, overturning chairs and staring, deathly white, into the faces of the newcomers. They were the debonair Shackleford, the suave Yves, and the splay-fingered Conradi, his crescent glowing sullenly on his lower lip.

Shackleford alone did not waste time. He was nearer the other door, and immediately threw it open, only to confront the revolvers of Davison and Diogenes.

"Very neatly done," he complimented Redmayne, whom he had by now recognized. "But entirely useless. We were making arrangements just now to send Miss Carr home—this very night. Isn't it the truth, Miss Carr?"

Redmayne started suddenly; for from a divan at the end of the room Anne Carr had arisen, her cheeks flaming red.

"Mr. Redmayne!"

The joy in her tone warmed Redmayne like new wine.

She came forward, her eyes on him. "I hope you will not show any mercy," she said, with her lips set. "It was a cruel trick they played me—kidnapping, drugging, and then getting the secret of that letter case from me while I was drugged."

She pointed to Yves.

"He was the man who did it. Hypnotism while I was asleep. Isn't it disgraceful? Why, I would have remained their prisoner forever rather than tell them where the case was!"

Redmayne's lips compressed themselves. "So that was the way of it, eh?"

"Steady!" warned Davison. "Don't forget that their hands are up—and that they've surrendered."

"Where is the letter case now?" asked Redmayne.

The girl pointed. "He has it," she said, indicating Guido Conradi.

"You have it?" asked Redmayne.

The Lombard nodded affirmatively, and came forward. "You want it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Redmayne.

Guido Conradi's hand went to his coat pocket, and he took out the ebony letter case. Coming closer to Redmayne, he extended his hand. More quickly than can be told, Conradi caught Redmayne's outstretched hand with his own left, and swung Redmayne around, hurling him against Marriott. The two stumbled and fell sprawling.

"Take it!" shouted Guido Conradi, laughing, and sped out of the room. Diogenes and Davison fired immediately; but they had only the echo of Conradi's laugh for their pains. The front door was thrown open, then slammed shut again.

Redmayne was the first to recover himself.

"Catch him!" wailed Anne. "He has the letter case."

Cursing his stupidity, Redmayne disentangled himself from Marriott, and ran after Guido Conradi just in time to see the Lombard climb into a gray motor car, release the lever, and spurt down the garden path to the main roadway.

Redmayne learned later that the machine had been brought out and made ready to take Anne back to Washington that night, and therefore stood prepared for Conradi's purpose. The Lombard had immediately thrown on the third speed, without any care for the consequences, and was vanishing through the grounds like a gray ghost at approach of dawn before Redmayne had dashed across the garden, jumped the fence, and climbed into his white car.

He set his teeth grimly and put the car to its limit of speed, although Adams warned him of danger with the roads in such bad condition. But he paid no heed to Adams, and held the steering wheel himself, while the chauffeur sat by, a prey to the most dismal of forebodings.

Redmayne followed the road almost by instinct; for he could not see the other machine in the vanishing shadows of the foothills. His eyes were wild, and his teeth bit his lip. It was for this very man and the papers he carried that he had made all these preparations, taken all these pains. He cared nothing for the arrest of Yves or Shackleford. It was Conradi who had murdered Caspar, Conradi who had insulted Anne, Conradi who held the ebony letter case, the cause of all the trouble.

"Please be careful, sir!"

It was Adams' voice, as he checked the machine just on the verge of a hill, to race down which at the third speed would have been suicidal. Even Conradi, apparently, had slackened his speed, for he was now visible near the base of the hill, crawling along at no great speed. Perforce Redmayne must adopt similar tactics, even though he saw his enemy whisking away across country ahead of him; but, once at the base, he shoved up several notches again, and pursued.

On level ground they began to gain rapidly on Conradi; for Redmayne's machine was a French model, and guaranteed to have the highest average speed of any touring car on the market. And so, under the moonlight, the gray runner was chased by the white one, the latter swiftly eating up the distance between them, and drawing nearer and nearer to the former. Once or twice Guido Conradi looked around and saw that the other machine was gaining.

He had reached the stage of desperation; for he knew that in the pursuing machine sat the man who was burning up with the desire to make the Lombard's life pay for that of the diplomat whom he had murdered. Shackleford had told Conradi of the terrible animosity which Redmayne had

for him; and Shackleford's description of Redmayne's none too merciful characteristics had set a chill going in the veins of Guido Conradi. Also there was the ebony letter case for which he had risked so much and, as yet, gained so little—the case that would pay all his debts when once sold, that would make him independent for a brief spell longer. He could not return to Paris or Nice if he did not pay his debts. It was both the money and his life if he escaped; it was the lack of both if he were captured.

He was crouching low over the steering wheel, the wind ruffling his closely cut hair, making his eyes water. The machine was going at the third speed; it tore recklessly over the rough roadway, bouncing high over uneven places, and veering on two wheels around curves, until it seemed that there was no possibility of its regaining balance; Conradi clinging to the wheel for dear life and sometimes veering the machine's course because of his own instability. So rapid was the pace that his head ached from the wind hurled against his eyes.

In this fashion the chase passed through the village of Lauderdale, sending stray dogs howling, their noses to the moon, and men and women swiftly indoors.

Redmayne was very close behind Conradi now, when they struck the steep grade that led down to the railroad station. Adams had sprung to the lever of the white car, shutting off the machine's extreme velocity; but Conradi, unseeing as he was, had struck the grade without altering his speed. The gray machine tore down the slope with such fierce speed that the wheels, to an onlooker, could have been but whirling Catherine wheels, grinding out sparks as the awful pace dried up the grease of their axles with the heat of friction.

Adams, ever alert behind his goggles, had seen what Redmayne had not seen, when he jerked back the lever and slackened the machine's pace, bringing it to a full stop, after a second or so.

"Confound you!" shouted Redmayne. "What the devil do you mean, Adams? Let go—what the devil do you mean, my man!"

"Look!" said Adams, shivering, as his finger pointed to the valley below.

The moon was very bright, now. In its light they saw the great cloud behind Conradi, and, below, the railroad ties and tracks—black, curving things. A harsh note came to Redmayne's ears—warning, presaging evil, mournful; it was repeated three times.

A white light shone suddenly on the black tracks—a locomotive headlight. Switching around a curve, there trailed behind the locomotive car after car of rough boards, laden with great blocks of uncut stone.

A moment, and the freight swept out of sight, hidden by the platform of the station. It emerged again to view, the headlight gleaming for a single instant.

Then the boom of things crashing came to their ears; they saw red flame, heard a hissing sound. Great clouds of black smoke were hurled upward at the moon. A brief second, breathless with horrified suspense; and the red flame and black smoke were succeeded by a huge belch of yellow fire. A thunderous, splitting, tearing noise hurt their eardrums.

The long line of freight cars quivered; then hung motionless in the moonlight.

Quite slowly, Redmayne let his machine go downhill to the scene of the disaster.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAUSE OF IT ALL.

When Redmayne returned to the Gilman house, he found prisoners and captors all in a state of intense excitement. Marriott, Davison, and Diogenes gave vent to great sighs of relief; Anne hid her face in her hands and cried hysterically; while Yves and Shackleford flushed red and tugged at their wrists, which were fastened together by steel circlets. Mr. Simpson Carker seemed to be the only one unconcerned.

Davison's hand was on Redmayne's shoulder. "Did you get them?"

Redmayne shook his head.

"What—he got away!" Marriott joined in the chorus, and Yves and Shackleford stared eagerly.

Quickly Redmayne told of the ride, of Conradi's wild flight downhill, and of his collision with the freight train.

"Yes, he's quite dead," he informed them. "So dead that they couldn't find anything but charred remnants of his body. The engineer is dead, too; the fireman probably done for."

Silence fell on all.

When Redmayne spoke again it was only to add: "As his body was completely burned, it's only fair to assume that to be the end of the ebony letter case."

Anne turned a tear-stained face to Redmayne.

"And I told you not to show any mercy. Oh, I didn't mean it, Mr. Redmayne! He wouldn't really have harmed me! I——"

"He got his deserts," said Redmayne sternly. "He murdered Caspar von Zuehohn."

Anne arose, wiping the tears from her eyes, and spoke to Davison.

"Please take off those handcuffs. There has been enough punishment—enough! Let them go—I can't bear to think of any more. If there is any one to blame, it is Conradi. He murdered Captain von Zuehohn. These men have only kidnapped me. I shall refuse to lay any charges against them. Let them go."

Davison looked at Redmayne, and drew him aside, whispering:

"I don't know but what she suggests is the best way out of it. We should have to implicate Miss Carnotti, and—after all, if Miss Carr refuses to prefer charges, where are we?"

Redmayne melted. "I guess you're right, Davison. There's been enough punishment. Let them go."

The assistant chief crossed over to the two prisoners.

"Suppose I let you off—will you promise me two things? First, to tell us just what that ebony letter case contained; second, to leave the country before the end of the week?"

"Only too gladly," agreed Shackleford.

Yves nodded.

Davison unlocked the handcuffs and set them free. They rubbed their wrists, eying one another and the assembled company.

"I think it perhaps better that you should tell, *mon cher* Shackleford," said Yves. "It is your tongue, the English. You may explain more succinctly than I."

"Well," began Shackleford, striking a match and lighting a cigarette, "it's not very complex or anything—this affair. It has to do with a great kingdom which——"

Davison broke in. "The country, I suppose, is——"

Shackleford cut him off and, lowering his tone slightly, mentioned the name of a world power.

"You know, of course, as well as I do, that political affairs there are at a serious pass. His majesty is old, and within a year or two, at the outside, the crown prince will succeed to the throne—if all goes well. You do not know, however, that her majesty, who was only eighteen when she married, had been indiscreet enough to fall hopelessly in love with a young lieutenant of her royal father's bodyguard. That stern old monarch who kept the political bigwigs of Europe on the *qui vive* for six years would brook no interference with his schemes for power, and young Von Gotthold was quietly informed as to the discretion which he was expected to exhibit. He saw how the land lay, and disappeared. As a matter of fact, he came to be near the young queen after her coronation, and took lodgings in a *strasse* near the royal grounds. The queen went by his lodgings each day, and thus they saw each other. Although they never spoke, she was unwise enough to write to him, and to receive his letters.

"She sent him that ebony letter case to keep her letters in; she knew that any one not possessed of the secret of opening it would grind the letters to pulp in trying to force it open.

"This went on until Von Gotthold

saw danger ahead for his love, and he solved the problem by leaving the capital and coming to America. And that is the whole affair as it stands."

"But," objected Davison, "what interest——"

"Wait! Von Gotthold always kept the letters, because they were all he had left of his love affair. When Prince Boris, nephew of the present king, who between us is at the bottom of the present mix-up in affairs, cast about him for a way of becoming king, he unearthed the Von Gotthold affair, and bribed the servant who had carried the queen's letters into telling him all about it. He then gave Conradi and Yves the commission of finding Von Gotthold. But before we had located him he died, and gave the papers to Caspar von Zuehohn, who had been his friend. Von Zuehohn communicated with the queen as to their disposition; and she told him to bring them to her when he came to Europe—which was to be next month. We found that Von Zuehohn kept the papers in a safe in his chambers. We had arranged to burglarize the safe and get the letters. Miss Carnotti warned him of this. He then carried the letter case with him. You know the rest."

He paused, and tossed his cigarette away.

"But," said Redmayne, "what was there so important about the letters as to make it worth Prince Boris' while to look for them?"

Shackleford shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe?*" he said. "That is something no one knows. The balance of power is a funny thing; you never can tell what is going to affect it. The mere fact that those letters were written by a queen to a former lover is sufficient, in the state of affairs at present, to swing the adherents of the crown prince over to the side of Prince Boris. And the fact that the queen wants to get hold of them is more than enough to make Boris suspect that they would be of use to him."

He ceased speaking, and again shrugged his shoulders.

Redmayne arose. "And you have caused all this anxiety on our part just to help a rotten usurper to another's place?" He faced Shackleford fiercely. "I'm almost sorry we promised to let you go. As it is, you'd better clear out before we change our minds!"

EPILOGUE.

The following extracts from Washington newspapers of various dates are of interest:

(The *Comet*)

Miss Bianca Carnotti, who will be remembered as a victim of burglary a month since, and who has been convalescing for some time at Stoneham Hospital, has been removed to an apartment in the Quebec.

A severe attack of concussion of the brain, brought about by a fall during the time the burglar was in her rooms, was the cause of Miss Carnotti's severe illness. She is now perfectly recovered; and the doctors say it will not be long before she regains her normal strength.

As is generally known among Washingtonians, Miss Carnotti is the fiancée of the Honorable Henry Aldis Carr, congressman from Virginia.

(The *Mercury*)

M. Ludovic Ives and Paul Shackleford, Esq., have registered at the Windsor, London, from Washington.

(The *Advocate*)

An engagement of great interest to society in general is that of Miss Anne Chilton Carr, of Warrenton, Virginia, to Mr. Arnold Redmayne, of Washington.

Miss Carr is the daughter of the late General Randolph Carr and Mrs. Sallie Custis Carr, a daughter of Lee Leighton Custis, a former supreme justice of Virginia. Her brother is the Honorable Henry Aldis Carr, whose engagement to Miss Bianca Carnotti has been already announced.

(The *Comet*)

The effects of the late Guido Conradi, who was accidentally killed last month in a collision while motoring, will be sold at auction to satisfy the claims placed against his estate by certain Washington firms.

(The *Mercury*)

Captain The Honorable Guy Crichton arrived in Washington to-day, to relieve Captain Henry Alleyne as second military attaché to the British embassy. Captain Alleyne sails for Southampton on the sixth, to report for duty with his regiment in Assouan. His leave-taking will be regretted by Washingtonians, among whom he was very popular.

The Martyrdom of an Oarsman

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke-Oar," "Peter Burnham, Journalist," Etc.

A blacksmith may become a good watch maker—if he is well trained. This applies also to the baseball player who tackles a rowing sweep. Everybody knows that Peter Burnham was a star slab artist; everybody will be interested to learn that he once rowed in an eight-oared shell, with extraordinary results to himself and to the rest of the crew.

THE senior class crew was in such desperate need of men that Ned Howarth, the captain, offered a bonus of a shore supper to volunteers who would consent to man the waist of the boat for the fall regatta. He could not hold out the hope of glory; for the senior eight had been whipped in every race for three years on end, and was the theme of unholy jests and derisive song. During its inglorious career there had been no fewer than five captains, each defeat resulting in mutiny and the uproarious election of a new leader.

Ned Howarth took this disgraceful crew no more seriously than had his predecessors; but he felt that it was his duty to muster eight men and a coxswain, and to enter the regatta for the honor of the class. In a spirit of levity he suggested to Peter Burnham, the crack pitcher of the Yale nine:

"You are not very busy on the diamond this fall. Why don't you give us a hand in the senior crew? Honestly, it is disgraceful to see the class show such a rotten lack of interest. Why, the race is only three weeks off, and we haven't put the shell in the water yet. Come on, Peter. It is great exercise."

The lanky pitcher, from an altitude of six feet three inches, regarded Howarth with a quizzical frown. To his mind, the honor of the class was second only to the prestige of the college, and he saw no humor in the dire straits of this notoriously useless crew. He had never handled a sweep, nor did he quite see how he could double his elongated frame within the cramped confines of a racing shell; but, if he ought to row, then row he would with might and main. Dubiously rubbing his chin, he replied:

"If you say so, Ned, I'll try my darndest, though it doesn't sound like my long suit. But, if I can swing a bat, I guess I can push one of those slim-waisted oars through the water. But I want you to understand that, if I go into this thing, our crew is going to try to win. I don't tie up to any athletic jokes. The man that lays down on the job has got me to whip."

"Now you're shouting, Peter!" Howarth grinned for joy. "I'll pass the word around, and the other class eights will be scared clean out of their rowing shoes when they hear what they are up against. Come down to the boathouse at three this afternoon."

Peter Burnham proved to be such a drawing card that a dozen seniors appeared as candidates and hugely enjoyed the tall pitcher's efforts to keep his knees from smiting his chin as he

floundered, splashed and sweated in the rocking shell. If his feet had not been strapped fast, he would have yanked himself overboard; but Peter was no quitter, and with muffled grunts he swung his prodigious length of back to and fro, and tried to heed the captain's exhortations.

The diminutive coxswain scolded him so waspishly that Peter yearned to straddle past the oarsmen in front of him and drop this pest overboard by the back of the neck; but, reflecting that the ordeal could be no worse than pitching the last inning of a Harvard game with the score tied and the bases filled, he ground his teeth and stolidly endured a mile pull down the harbor.

After he had crawled from the shell, aching in a great many muscles which he had never before suspected he owned, Ned Howarth asked him pleasantly:

"Was it as good fun as you expected, Peter? I am counting on you to pull Number Four from now on."

"Good fun—hell!" growled the plain-spoken pitcher. "And some of these varsity crew men have the nerve to tell me they like it. I didn't know there were so many liars in Yale college. Oh, yes, I'll pull, if you want me to. But don't you let me hear you call rowing 'a college sport.' It will make me peevish, and might break up our friendship."

When the senior crew foregathered at the boathouse next day, they found a stocky, rosy-cheeked man, of perhaps thirty years, walking up and down the float with his hands in his pockets, and gazing at the river. He nodded cordially as the men filed toward the dressing rooms, while Ned Howarth poked Peter in the ribs and exclaimed very excitedly:

"That's 'Pa' Kingsley! You must have heard of him. He was captain and stroke of the great record-breaking crew seven years ago. He was in my brother Jim's class. I suppose he has dropped into town to look over the varsity material, and maybe give them some pair-oar coaching. I am certainly ashamed to have him see our job lot of misfits claw the water. It will make him sick."

"Don't let him rattle you. Keep your eye on the ball," exhorted Peter. "He may not see any records broken, but, by the great horn spoon, we will show him we are in dead earnest, Ned."

A few minutes later, the famous Pa Kingsley introduced himself to Howarth on the float, and added, with an engaging smile:

"You must be Jim Howarth's kid brother. Any kin of his is a friend of mine. This is the senior eight, is it? I am waiting for a couple of the varsity men; but they can't get out of recitations until four o'clock. If you like, I'll be glad to steer your boat and coach you for a little while. Getting hammered into pretty good shape by this time, I suppose?"

Howarth looked confused, and his comrades snickered audibly, the four ex-captains finding particular joy in the situation. Only Peter Burnham was unmoved, and a glance at his scowling mien made Howarth answer as gravely as he could:

"Delighted, and thank you, Mr. Kingsley; but this is our second day on the water, and we are pretty bad. Our class does not support the crew as it should."

Kingsley surveyed the group with an expression of humorous surprise; for in height they ranged from Peter Burnham, the sky-scraper, down to chunky "Bunch" Lee, who could boast of no more than five feet seven inches.

"Rather an uneven collection, I should say; but you never can tell. It is all in getting together," was the coach's tactful comment, as he stepped into the coxswain's seat. "Don't capsize the shell, please. I never saw an eight-oared boat upset, but you fellows are apt to do 'most anything."

The crew had rowed a few strokes amid showers of spray, when Kingsley bade them halt, and sputtered:

"This outfit must look like a paralytic centipede, from the boathouse. Now, see here, it is a disgrace to a Yale class to turn out this kind of a caricature! Howarth, for the sake of your name,

and because I think the world of your brother, I am going to lay over in New Haven for a week or so and lick you freaks into shape—if I have to kill you. Will you do your best?"

"You bet we will," heartily chorused the boat, from stern to bow; whereupon the self-sacrificing Pa Kingsley, who loved nothing better than browbeating a crew, began to coach in dead earnest. When at length the tired and dripping men were permitted to climb stiffly from the shell, he said in an aside to Ned Howarth:

"Peter Burnham is a great pitcher, and I don't want to hurt his feelings; but—my stars!—there is too much of him to put into one boat. He is as thin as the last run of shad, and he warps and kinks himself into hard knots. Can't you convey it to him gently and try another man in his place?"

"Not on your life!" very decidedly returned the captain. "I beg your pardon for being so obstinate; but I coaxed Peter to row, and he has the right spirit. He will break his neck to win, and his example is going to hold the other fellows right up to their work. You see, sir, our class crew has always been a merry jest, and Peter is about the first man to take it seriously. Can't you make him cut off his stroke about a foot at either end, or put hobbles on him so he will be in time with the other men?"

"If you put it that way, I will try to make him fit in," said Pa Kingsley, pleased with the youngster's spirited defense of his classmate.

On their way to the campus, Ned Howarth explained to Peter:

"Kingsley is the man who broke his oar and jumped overboard in the great Yale race against the Triton Boat Club on the New Haven harbor course. You must have heard of it. The Tritons were the crack amateur club crew of the country, and were ready to bet all kinds of money that they could whip the fastest college eight that ever floated. Kingsley was rowing stroke for Yale, and they were only a mile from the red buoy, almost out in the open Sound, when his oar snapped, and over he popped like a shot—and he couldn't swim more than a dozen strokes, to save his soul!

"Our launch picked him up; but he was about all in, and could just manage to gurgle that he didn't propose to be a damned passenger and make his crew carry dead weight for three miles. Number Seven picked up the job of stroking the boat, without turning a hair; and they all licked into it for dear life, rowed the greatest race you ever saw, and beat the Tritons by three lengths in four miles. The college went clean crazy about it."

"Um-m—great, wasn't it? I never used to read anything but baseball news in those days," said Peter Burnham, and his black eyes burned like coals. "There is the real, true-blue Yale spirit for you, Ned. So the proper thing to do is jump overboard if you break an oar, is it?"

"Yes, but *you* wouldn't have to swim, Peter. Just you step carefully out and wade ashore, if it ever happens to you."

The dramatic episode seemed to make a vivid impression upon the mind of the pitcher, and thereafter his demeanor toward Pa Kingsley was that of a respectful admirer; and he bore with exemplary patience the tongue-lashings inspired by his painfully awkward efforts in the boat. Peter Burnham was a valuable moral force, however, and he tried to make the other men regard rowing as earnestly as he did.

They were honestly endeavoring to be a credit to their class, and the unexpected help of so masterly a teacher as Pa Kingsley worked wonders, until the sophomores and juniors began to fear their rivalry. By dint of superhuman exertion, Peter Burnham was taught to curtail the swing of his amazing length of back, and to maintain a semblance of harmony with his shorter-coupled comrades. It was not a pretty crew to look at; but there was no lack of courage and ginger, and the men could be depended on to pull themselves to a standstill.

In the days of Peter Burnham the fall regatta was rowed on Lake Saltonstall, famed in the old college song:

And if it be a girl, sir,
I'll dress her up in blue,
And send her out to Saltonstall
To coach the freshman crew.

This beautiful sheet of water is several miles distant from New Haven, framed in heavily wooded hills which seemed like a bit of wilderness, so thinly peopled was the region near the lake.

The races were started at the upper end, almost two miles from the rude boathouse and the railroad that skirted the foot of the lake; and the hundreds of undergraduates who cheered their class oarsmen could see no more than the finishes.

It was on a crisp October afternoon that the senior crew launched its shell and made ready to row up this sparkling stretch toward the starting place. The other class crews had preceded them, and were lazily skating over the polished surface, like gigantic water beetles. The hills were ablaze with autumn coloring; the bright air was keen with frost; and the water was uncomfortably chill as it splashed from the dripping blades.

Pa Kingsley had departed reluctantly several days earlier, with a parting exhortation to his erratic protégés to "keep their slides under them and hit it on the catch as if the devil were after them."

Peter Burnham was thinking hard of the particular advice with which he had been bombarded; and, as he rocked his long body clumsily back and forth, his face was as darkly, grimly determined as though he were waiting for the umpire to call "time" in the deciding game of a championship baseball series. Two or three of the crew, including the captain, were afraid that Peter would knock their heads together if they suffered defeat. The shell wobbled and rolled, and the blades took the water at various angles; but there was compensating life and power in the lifting stride, and the other crews, whose style was much smoother, gazed with sudden anxiety at this boatload of "Pa Kingsley's misfits."

Far up the quiet, uninhabited reaches of the lake, the seniors pulled their shell around, to align it in position for the start. Three other eights were paddling and drifting toward their respective stakeboats, amid a great shouting of orders. One by one the coxswains jockeyed their crews into place, and clutched the ropes attached to the empty stakeboats, by means of which they held their eager eights in leash. The starter fired a pistol from a skiff anchored off to one side, and the four class crews dug into the water with tremendous fury.

In the tense excitement of the moment, Peter Burnham thought only of swinging every ounce of energy in him against the handle of the pliant sweep. Thrown to the winds were the painstaking admonitions of Pa Kingsley. He seemed to stretch and elongate like an india-rubber man, and the length of his stroke was so extraordinary that he could not pull it through to the finish without a jerk that lifted him clear of his sliding seat. His mental distress was most acute; but his crew was gallantly holding its own, and, to his delighted amazement, began very slowly to surge ahead of the juniors, who were lashing the lake into foam immediately to starboard.

"Now for a three-bagger!" yelled Peter, as he doubled himself up and lay back on his oar with his eyes shut. "You are all out of time with me. Why don't you get together?"

"Why don't you keep in time with the crew, you crazy old fool?" shouted the coxswain. "Watch the man in front of you."

Incredible as it appeared to the rival crews, the senior eight, jabbing away at some forty strokes per minute, was making a terrific race of it, and by pluck and main strength was creeping into the lead, beyond a doubt. The others had been caught napping. They were absorbed in watching each other, and had underrated this boatload of outcasts, after all.

Wilder and wilder became the oarsmanship of Peter Burnham. This was no time for finicky science, thought he, and the only sensible way to lick the

other fellow at this game was to pull as hard and as fast as you could. Halfway down the course he was pumped for breath, and was banging into the man in front of him, now with his head, again with his oar handle. It would have broken his heart to know it; but, if the crew should win, it must be in spite of him.

At last he lifted himself bodily from his seat in a heave that would have uprooted a goodly tree, and—crack!—the overworked oar buckled and snapped in twain. For an instant Peter sat glaring at the splintered handle gripped in his brawny fist, while the coxswain cried, in great distress:

"Sit still and try to keep out of the other men's way, Peter! We've got to win with seven men."

In a flash of memory Peter recalled the heroic feat of Pa Kingsley in the race against the Triton eight. The only proper thing to be done in these tragic circumstances was to jump overboard. Leaning far out, he coolly grasped the outrigger, released the trailing piece of oar from its lock, and flung it clear.

The boat rolled as he shifted his weight, and Ned Howarth, at stroke, shouted imploringly:

"You can't jump from the middle of the boat! The port oars will knock your brains out. Forget it!"

"I play the game according to the rules, and here goes!" snorted Peter, as he jerked his feet free of the straps, arose nimbly, and lurched heavily over the side—head foremost.

Ned Howarth and Number Six, gasping with horror, were in the middle of a stroke, and could not wrench their blades from the water; but by a miracle of luck Peter lingered beneath the surface long enough to escape collision, and came bobbing up abaft the swirling rudder. Lustily treading water, he waved a fist in farewell, while the short-handed crew spurted with renewed ardor, determined to win or die.

The race swept on, and Peter was left to fight his way to the nearest shore; for not a solitary boat had followed the flight of the crews down the lake. The water was exceedingly cold; but the strong heart of Peter Burnham was warmed by the consciousness of duty done as the situation demanded, and he swam with sturdy strokes for a point of rock that jutted from the umbrageous bank.

It was not until he had crawled shivering from the water, and was forlornly perched upon the sunny side of the rock, that Peter realized his unutterably distressful plight. His only garments were a scanty pair of rowing trunks and woolen socks; for he had pulled off his jersey at the stakeboat, in order to be stripped to the waist, as was the Spartan custom of these young oarsmen. The October wind made his teeth chatter, as he gazed sadly up the deserted lake and could perceive no hope of rescue in that quarter.

The boathouse was almost a mile below, hidden from his vision by a curve of the shore line. The only human beings in sight were a farmer and his bevy of women folk, seated upon the opposite bank, who were regarding the derelict with what must have been sympathetic emotions.

Abashed at thought of his airy costume, Peter coyly withdrew into the underbrush, which painfully scratched and tickled his long legs and unprotected body. Through thicket, swamp, and dense woodland, he dismally surmised, he must make his way on foot to the distant boathouse. He was a modest young man, and the thought of parading along a public highway, even if he were lucky enough to find one, made him blush. It was to be moving or to freeze in his tracks; and gingerly, with strides high and wide, he pranced through the bushes, the most startling denizen of the forest since the painted Indian had roamed this way in breechclout and moccasins.

"Ouch—there won't be a square inch of hide left on me!" groaned Peter, as he wriggled from an ambush of briers. "I did my stunt according to rule, but I thought they always had a launch or something to pick a man up. This is the billy-be-damnedest pickle that ever happened outside of a nightmare."

A very long and slim white streak, this unfortunate oarsman picked his way through a morass, voicing loud and frequently profane lamentations, trying to skirt the lake shore, but compelled to make detours inland in order to pass around the stretches of sheer rock that jutted from the water's edge. His progress was slow, and the sun was dropping behind the lofty hills. The air became more chill and searching, and Peter Burnham would have sworn that the temperature had plunged below zero.

At length he came to a wide, swampy patch thickly grown in bramble and saw-tooth rushes, and he waded into the lake in order to flank it. But, after stepping off a ledge in icy water to his waist, he floundered ashore and sought to circumnavigate the landward end of this barrier.

Mounting a small hill, Peter came to the edge of a steep gully, beyond which gleamed a white streak of turnpike. Tied to a tree at the roadside was a two-horse team harnessed to a spring wagon, or open carryall, obviously belonging to some one who had driven from home to view the boat race from a nearby point of vantage.

Peter had no intention of confiscating the team; and, finding the coast clear, he thought to steal along the highway until the swamp lay behind him. Scrambling down the treacherous slope, which was slippery with moss and rotting leaves, he tripped, fell head over heels, and rolled to the bottom and out upon the road, like a shot rabbit.

The horses were mettlesome, and when, without warning, this singular apparition sprawled under their noses, they instantly fell victims to acute equine hysterics. With one wild plunge they broke the strap that anchored them to the tree, and fled the scene. Picking himself up before they had gathered full headway, Peter saw at a glance that he had wrought the mischief, and leaped in pursuit. He was the fastest base runner of the Yale diamond, and a few space-devouring strides landed him close behind the wagon. His long arms shot out, and his sinewy fingers gripped the rear seat. With a stupendous heave and spring, he pulled himself on board, and scrambled forward to lay hold of the reins.

Bracing himself against the dashboard, Peter pulled as though he were at one end of an oar; but by this time the addle-headed horses had determined to make a runaway of it, and, with bits in their teeth and necks extended, they were careering along the turnpike, which rang to the rataplan of their pounding hoofs. They were strong, well-conditioned beasts; and in vain Peter tugged and seesawed until he realized that, to save his neck, he must think only of keeping them in the road.

Clad only in his rowing trunks and woolen socks, he was being madly whirled he knew not whither—out of the frying pan into the fire. As a chariot driver of ancient Babylon his costume might have passed muster, but in this staid farming region of Puritan New England he was a strange and even scandalous figure. Small time had Peter Burnham, however, to think of such trifles, as the wagon caromed and bounded from side to side of the rutted road, while the horses maintained their headlong gait with untiring frenzy.

Fortunately, the turnpike ran fairly straight and wide, and Peter's uncommon strength of hand and arm kept his steeds from bolting into trees and telephone poles. Once he met a team, and his heart grew sick within him; but the other man drove desperately up a bank in time to escape wreckage, and turned to stare, wide-eyed, at the spectral figure that flashed past him with a rattle and roar.

If Peter's whirling thoughts could have been focused in speech, he might have said to himself:

"Where in blazes am I heading for now? This started out to be a boat race—and look at me! Going hell-bent without any clothes in a wagon I never saw before—and how shall I ever get home? Why didn't I have sense enough to stick to baseball?"

The fiery steeds could not bolt forever into the unknown; and, after running for some time at top speed, the

sight of their heaving sides and lathered flanks inspired the melancholy young man with hope that there might really be an end of his misfortunes. Little by little, the pace slackened, until the strain on his aching arms had sensibly lessened, and he was able to get a fresh grip of the reins. Yearningly he glanced down at a plaid carriage blanket rumpled beneath his feet; but he dared not stoop to pick it up with one hand, for the team was not yet under control. He would have given all his hopes of making a fortune in after years to feel that warm robe cuddle across his bare shoulders; but the time was not ripe.

Little children playing in dooryards stared at the uncanny vision which thundered past in a cloud of dust, and ran, screaming, to their mothers. Peter heeded them not, but gazed straight ahead and yanked viciously at the reins, until the weary horses subsided into a lagging trot. Then he clawed for the plaid blanket, pulled it around him with one hand, and drove with the other.

Hopelessly lost in a region wholly unknown to him, unable to whip his courage to the point of seeking refuge and trying to explain himself, Peter allowed the horses to shuffle along at their own will; for they appeared to have a destination in mind. The cold wind played wickedly about his bare shanks, but the blanket was a protection to be profoundly grateful for. Unfortunately, Peter lacked a sense of humor and was unable to perceive the ludicrous aspect of his dilemma, as he grumbled to himself:

"These misbegotten brutes seem to be going home, wherever that is. What kind of a story can I put up when they get there? I suppose I ought to hop off and take to the woods, but I'd kill a man for the chance of hugging a red-hot stove and swiping a pair of trousers. I am going to stand by the ship. I jumped overboard once to-day, and it—for the love of Heaven, look what it did to me!"

Peter drew the plaid blanket closer around his shivering frame, and gloomily surveyed the darkening landscape, which appeared unfriendly and forbidding. Suddenly the horses cocked their ears, moved at a brisker pace, and veered into a grassy lane toward a square white farmhouse set among towering elms. Peter's heart thumped against his ribs, and he thought of jumping out and making his way to New Haven on foot under cover of darkness. But he saw a picture of himself parading through the lighted city streets draped in a plaid horse blanket, and with a shudder he decided to face whatever fate awaited him at the farmhouse.

Huddled low on the seat, as though to make himself as small as possible, Peter was borne rapidly up the lane, past the side porch of the dwelling, and toward a large barn whose doors had been left open.

From the kitchen door emerged a woman, vaguely discerned by Peter, who called, in a high-pitched, querulous voice:

"Back so soon, Henry? Land sakes alive! You're alone, ain't you? Where did you leave the folks, I want to know."

Advancing to the end of the porch, she peered at the wagon which Peter had brought to a halt, and he made her out to be an elderly person, of a thin, acidulous cast of countenance, surmounted by gray corkscrew curls. The sight of the shapeless figure slumped alone on the wagon seat threw her into violent consternation, and with shriller vehemence she ejaculated:

"Why, it ain't Henry! Goodness me, *what is it?* Mercy me! It's our hosses with a lunatic thingumabob a-drivin' of 'em. The folks have been murdered. Whee-ee—help—help! And not a livin' man on the place!"

Wringing her hands, she fled indoors, and could be heard fumbling with locks and bolts. With a weary shrug, Peter drove the team into the barn, methodically unharnessed, blanketed and tied them in empty stalls, as the least he could do to mend the wrong he had wrought to the stranded and abandoned "folks." Girding himself with a stray bit of rope, he stalked to-

ward the house, muttering in a tired voice:

"Nobody home but a fretty old maid, and I am left to perish in sight of warmth and clothes. All I can do is to make signs at her, or crawl up the roof and drop down the chimney."

His woolen socks made no sound as he mounted the porch and stooped to look through the lighted kitchen window. The demoralized spinster had barricaded herself behind a table, and was fanning the air with a coal shovel. Startled afresh by the grotesque figure that glowered at her from without, she screamed, and ran upstairs with amazing velocity. Peter retreated to the steps, and sat down, doubling his legs under the plaid blanket, resting his chin in his hands, a beaten, broken man. In this stupor of sullen dejection he remained for some time, until the lone inmate of the farmhouse raised a window somewhere above him, and cautiously poked forth her corkscrew curls in a courageous reconnoitre. Peter glanced up and observed plaintively:

"I'm still here. You can't drive me away, ma'am. I'm perfectly harmless. A small child could club me to death without the slightest risk. Lend me a few old clothes and a pair of number twelve shoes, and I'll burn the wind getting away from here. I dare not tell you how it happened. Your poor brain could not stand it. But your folks are alive and well."

As a rule, the speech of Peter Burnham was somewhat harsh and abrupt; but sorrow had so crushed him that this appeal was voiced in gentle, timorous accents which made his auditor feel less fear of him than before, and she remained hanging out of the window while she expostulated:

"I suppose your keeper was careless, and you got away from him somehow. And I've always heard its best to be soothin' with poor, demented critters like you. A-roamin' the country in a hoss blanket and bare legs! The idea! Are you really sane enough to tell me where you come from, and what you're doin' with Brother Henry's team?"

"I was rowing in the class boat race on Lake Saltonstall, and I jumped overboard and jumped into the buggy, trying to stop them," patiently but confusingly began Peter from the shadows.

"That will do, young man. Sss-s-h! Don't you dare to be took vi'lent!" severely broke in the listening dame. "It sounds crazier and wuss than I imagined. I've heard of the pranks of them college students, but there ain't a bit of rhyme or reason to what you're tellin' me. You are a lunatic, I tell you. Shoo—scat—go 'way!"

"For God's sake, madam, where can I go?" wailed Peter. "Throw me down a pair of Brother Henry's trousers, and I will send them back to-morrow—upon my honor, I will. I'm frozen to death."

"Henry is only five foot six in his stockin's," said she, in a yielding mood. "The Berrymans is all sawed-off men, built close to the ground. And you're seven foot high, if you're an inch. You can't get 'em on, or I'd throw you down Henry's best Sunday suit, to get rid of you."

"I am not very thick through, and I can get them on somehow," was Peter's hopeful reply. "Any old duds will do. Please, oh, please hurry up!"

She vanished from the window, and Peter waited in lugubrious isolation, tormented by the fear that she might not return. Presently, however, a garment sailed down from above and wrapped itself about his head; then another, and a stiff hat and a pair of shoes landed close after. He tucked them under one arm and galloped toward the barn, while from the upper window came the shrill exhortation:

"Don't you set the barn afire, and you just get away from here as quick as them long legs can carry you! If I'm really and truly goin' to escape with my life, the good Lord be praised."

The window came down with a bang, but Peter did not turn his head. He was wriggling into a pair of trousers which stopped just below his knees, and squirming into a bobtailed black coat whose sleeves ended at his sharp elbows. There was an appalling gap between the two garments, and Peter ingeniously wrapped a gunny sack

around his middle to serve as a waistcoat. Tugging at the coat, he managed to button it, and, abandoning the shoes as hopelessly small, he jammed the absurdly flat derby hat, of ancient vintage, on his head, drove it home with a vicious blow, and limped out of the barn to seek the road to New Haven. Hungry and footsore as he was, his homeward march was no small ordeal to contemplate; but it seemed so trifling, compared with what had gone before, that his spirits began to rise.

The hour was drawing near midnight when this pitiable wayfarer tramped up the back streets of New Haven, shrinking from public notice, but unable to evade the jeering comments of a few stray loafers who trailed after him in an interested little procession. In a smouldering rage, Peter footed it slowly along the rough pavement, his woolen socks worn to shreds, the tails of his ridiculous coat flapping against the small of his back, his bare shanks gleaming grandly, his funny little flat hat cocked over one eye.

At length he came in sight of a comfortable-looking white house, abutting the sidewalk of a small street leading toward the campus. The appearance of the house was old-fashioned and dignified, but light streamed from every small-paned window at this unseemly hour, and Peter heard the mocking sounds of song and laughter.

He had not thought of turning into this tavern, which still bore the name of the lamented Mrs. Moriarity; but the rollicking chorus of a long Yale cheer made him stand stock-still and stare at the lighted windows, for clear and distinct at the end of the nine "rahs" he heard the company shouting:

"Peter Burnham—Peter Burnham—Peter *Burnham!*"

The sorry caricature of Peter Burnham, leaning against a lamp-post in the chilly night, cocked his head with an air of acute surprise, and murmured:

"It must be that darned senior crew. But what are they celebrating, and why are they cheering me? I'm going in. This sounds like getting back home, sure enough."

Kicking open the swinging door, he strode into the taproom, and at sight of him the revelers were stricken dumb as oysters. Their emotions were so overpowering that Peter was the first to break the silence with: "Well, here I am. Who won the race?"

A mighty roar of laughter shook the low rafters. Then with one accord the members of the senior crew fell upon their lost comrade, dragged him to a chair, and yelled for drinks. The longer they gazed at Peter Burnham, the harder they laughed, while he sat in his impossible raiment, glumly eying them, with his weary feet hoisted on a chair.

It was Ned Howarth who managed to gasp:

"We won with seven men, Peter. It was your victory; for if you had stayed in the boat and kept on rowing we would have been licked sure. That's why we were cheering you just now. Oh, oh—where did you get 'em, and where have you been?"

"A nice lot of yaps you are, to call yourselves friends of mine!" growled the unreconciled Peter, tenderly caressing his shins. "How did you know I wasn't drowned?"

"We saw you swim ashore and sit down on the rocks," gurgled the coxswain, who was wiping his eyes. "Did a naughty tramp kidnap our little Peter? Explain those clothes—quick!"

"So you won the race!" Peter actually smiled. "You can't hurt my feelings by telling me I won it by quitting the confounded boat. I never said I could row. I hated the whole silly business. If I tell you what it landed me into, you will call me seventeen kinds of a liar. Give me four orders of poached eggs, a bushel of toast and a gallon of coffee; and I shall be in shape to give you a line of talk that has Mister Gulliver's Travels skinned a mile."

"But that dinky little hat, Peter, and that coat!" implored Howarth. "And that fancy waistcoat—so simple, yet so natty! And those poor sprained feet, and the frazzled socks! And six hours to be accounted for! We can't wait. We will blow up, to a man. We stayed

at the lake until after dark and ransacked the woods, and then brought your clothes home from the boathouse."

"Then one of you fellows can run up to college and get them," snapped Peter. "I'll dress down here between eats. All I care a hang for is that you won the race. Was I as rotten as all that, Ned?"

"You got excited and forgot your coaching a bit, but you meant well," tactfully replied the captain. "Nobody else could do much rowing as long as you were swinging all over the boat from stroke to bow. It was Pa Kingsley's coaching that saved the day for us. I sent him a telegram to-night. But you surely helped to put the right spirit into the crew, Peter; and we are awfully proud of you. But *would* you mind turning loose a few paragraphs of the first chapter?"

A waiter slid in front of Peter a platter of cold meat and a loaf of bread, to serve as a preliminary round. Thus fortified, the wanderer graciously began to unfold the singular narrative of the broken oar, the runaway team, the elderly spinster and Brother Henry's garments. When the tale was brought to a close, the coxswain, who had a notable bump of curiosity, piped up:

"But what became of the folks that belonged in the wagon, Peter?"

"You can take the clothes back to-morrow and find out, kid. I had troubles enough of my own."

"*Now* don't you think rowing is sport?" asked Ned Howarth, with twinkling eyes.

"Sport!" roared Peter, as he pounded the table and then jerked his little hat over one ear. "Sport! It's a three-ringed circus. But never again for me, until they revise the rules and bar that broken-oar, jumping-overboard stunt. Gad, though, I *am* glad I helped win the race by getting out of it!"

HOW WALKING STICKS ARE MADE

WALKING STICKS in the rough state are often very crooked; but they are not, for this reason, thrown out. A heap of sand is heated over a furnace and well dampened, and in it the rough sticks are placed, to remain until they become pliable.

They are then taken out, and, while still hot, are fixed at one end to a notched board, where skilled workmen are waiting to pull and knead them into a straight line. They retain their straightness when cold again, unless by some oversight unseasoned material has been handled.

Bamboos and other canes are bent by dry heat. They are held over a gas-jet until they become soft; and so soft do some of the thinner canes get that they can actually be tied into knots without splitting. The gas naturally chars the cane, but the marks can generally be removed in the further processes of cleaning and polishing.

NEVER SAY "A HERD OF HOGS"

PEOPLE are often at a loss how to describe groups of animals and birds. Therefore, the following will prove interesting. You should say:

A covey of partridges, a nide of pheasants, a wisp of snipe, a flight of doves or swallows, a muster of peacocks, a siege of herons, a brood of grouse, a plump of wild fowl, a stand of plovers, a watch of nightingales, a flock of geese, a herd or bunch of cattle, a bevy of quails, a cast of hawks, a swarm of bees, a school of whales, a shoal of herrings, a herd of swine, a skulk of foxes, a pack of wolves, a drove of oxen, a sounder of hogs, a troop of monkeys, a pride of lions, a sleuth of bears, and a gang of elk.

The New Moonstone

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Zollenstein," "Lisping Jimmie and the Leak," Etc.

Forty-one years ago the reading public sat up and gasped with the shock of a new sensation; for Wilkie Collins had published "The Moonstone," the most perfect detective story ever written. Our readers who know and delight in that famous narrative will welcome this new story by the author of "Garrison's Finish." Mr. Ferguson has borrowed the title of the masterpiece and, purposely using a similarity of plot and situations, has evolved an up-to-date mystery story, laid in the United States, at whose solution the reader will guess in vain.

Prefatory Statement by Mr. Quentin Bone.

ALTHOUGH I occupy but an insignificant position in the story which is about to follow, it is nevertheless quite fitting that the honor of this introduction should be relegated to me; for it was I who proposed to John Verdyne that the remarkable episodes which had their inauguration at his country residence were worthy of being preserved in print, and it was mainly through and by my efforts that the gentleman with whom I bear the burden of the narrative was induced to relate his own story.

It necessitated persistence, coupled with logic, to overcome this gentleman's reluctance; he taking the stand that he was unversed in the ways of letters, and that he doubted if such a proceeding would be consonant with the ethics of his profession. However, I finally overcame his scruples by convincing him that his assistance was absolutely essential; that it was my intention, together with that of Mr. John Verdyne, to set down as truthful an account as is humanly possible; and that such a consummation could be effected only by enlisting the assistance of those who owned an intimate and vital acquaintance with the matter. In short, it was our aim to secure, not the viewpoint of the audience, necessarily more or less restricted, but that of the actors' themselves.

The gentleman in question finally acceded to our wishes, with the understanding, however, that he be permitted to relate merely such incidents as came immediately under his notice, and that, if he deemed it expedient so to do, he might substitute the narratives of those individuals who might own a more personal knowledge of certain incidents than he himself.

It was further stipulated that he should be absolved from all explanatory statements; and this, I take it, was both fair and expedient, and, moreover, entirely consonant with the policy of veracity which Mr. Verdyne and myself have endeavored to carry into effect.

Having a horror of publicity, and being unusually diffident—whatever my detractors may affirm to the contrary—I endeavored to have Mr. Verdyne relate those incidents which go to form the first half of this story; but he

pleaded inability and lack of time, and also, with some truth, pointed out that, were he to give his viewpoint, the narrative would have no interest for the reader, as he would be under the necessity of relating those facts of which we were ignorant; and he would therefore, as it were, be helping to solve a problem before it had been properly stated.

So I find, as is generally the case, that the suggester of a plan or scheme must stand ready and able to carry his proposals into effect. Much against my inclination, therefore, I assume the responsibility of relating the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. John Verdyne's diamond—which was, I believe, the largest in existence. As the collection and not the writing of manuscripts is my art, I must ask such an audience as I may have to bear with whatever errors of diction and style they may discern. As I have heretofore stated, my fundamental object is veracity and accuracy—and, believe me, these terms are not synonymous.

Before I begin my direct narrative I wish to state that the title "New Moonstone" originated with myself; nor did I thus venture to christen Mrs. John Verdyne's diamond until after its disappearance. Those who are familiar with the great novelist's masterpiece—and surely few are not—will, I venture to think, concur in my opinion, should they follow this manuscript to the end, that the remarkable incidents portrayed in that work of fiction, written half a century past, have to a certain extent been paralleled at this later period. Although in no way is the solution the same, nor, in fact, properly speaking, are the episodes themselves, yet there remained sufficient similarity to warrant my selecting the title above mentioned.

To those critics who may be inclined to charge me with adding a fictional interest to the narrative, I have only to point out, quite aside from my own social standing, that occupied by the principal characters. Although in certain instances I have necessarily employed fictitious names, yet I have in my possession proof capable of convincing the most chronic skeptic that I have not violated in the smallest instance my family motto of *"Magna est veritas, et prevalebit."*

Having thus cleared the way, as it were, I will proceed with my direct narrative.

CHAPTER I.

I will begin by stating that I have known John Verdyne for many years. I first met him at Harvard, where, although I was a third-year man, we formed a mutual regard and liking. He was everything that I am not; for I might as well confess before I go further that I have done nothing in life but pose as a bibliophile and exist on inherited wealth.

Verdyne, on the other hand, was desperately poor, worked his way through college, and finished by becoming editor of the *Lampoon* and class salutatorian. He seemed destined for a professorship, and it was much to my disappointment that I subsequently learned that, on his graduation, he had selected a commercial career.

At the time I was messing about the Continent; but we had kept up a desultory correspondence, and I remember well the reasons he gave for his decision. He owned the misfortune of being rendered an orphan in early youth; and so, in my letter to him, I ventured to enclose a few moral precepts of my father's which had supported me in the critical stages of my life. He replied with characteristic promptness.

"Thanks every so much," he said, "for the Biblical exhortations and kindred advice which you evidently copied at the expense of both time and exertion. Your writing is improving. Regarding my decision, it is irrevocable. I have had one object in life—have always had it as long as I can remember—and the step I am now taking is necessary for its attainment. So I must content myself with the conventional S. B., and when I have, like David, my tens of thousands, and can give circumspectly to charity, I will acquire all the degrees in the universe and support culture on a full stomach. Perhaps I am a back-

slider, but if I only land in a heap of money I'll consider the descent worth while. You won't hear from me again until I have collided with a million or so."

Nor did I. I heard indirectly that Verdyne had entered Wall Street, and I suspected that he had given himself body and soul to Mammon. It was a great shock and disappointment to me; for I considered him worthy of better things, and I abhorred any form of gambling. I have strictly followed my dear father's last advice: "Keep out of the Street, if it is the only work you ever do."

I held to my intention of permitting Verdyne to be the first to renew our former intimacy; and, being greatly skeptical of his ever acquiring a fortune, I made the reservation that I would give him three years or so before calling myself to his attention.

The alloted three years passed before I had direct news of him. I was still in Paris at that time. One night at the Varieties a man dropped into the seat beside me; he happened to be none other than Randall Lockhaven, who had chummed at college with Verdyne and myself. To my surprise, I now learned that Verdyne was in Arizona.

"Then he has given up all idea of a commercial life?" I said, with considerable satisfaction. "I thought a brilliant mining engineer was lost when he entered Wall Street."

Lockhaven eyed me queerly. "Who said Verdyne ever thought of dabbling in stocks? Aren't there anything but brokerage houses in the financial district?"

"But he said he was going in for making money, and that I wouldn't hear from him until he had made a million."

Lockhaven smiled. "I see Verdyne hasn't lost zest in you yet. He's out for his million in literal cold, hard cash —diamonds. He's heading a New York concern, looking for buried treasure. That's all I can tell you now; but the deal's worth thirteen million or so, and if Verdyne has any luck at all it won't be very long until you hear from him."

"Buried treasure?" said I. "Of all the fool, crazy ideas! I could have forgiven him Wall Street, but this——"

"Beats hunting for the North Pole or solving perpetual motion, eh?" laughed Lockhaven. "But I'm in on the venture; so you can label me ass with the rest. If you'd like to join——"

"No—no!" I hastened to say. "I'm against gambling in any form, and this —why, it's a losing bet!"

"Maybe," he returned. "Like drawing to a royal flush; but all my chips are in. However, I've a blue one left, and I'll bet it on Verdyne if you'll take the other end."

Again I declined.

Three years later I returned to New York, to find John Verdyne one quarter owner in the now famous Meteor mine. He had also been newly married.

I have related all the foregoing details with a purpose; for they had each its special significance in the subsequent happenings. It is likewise necessary for me to give a brief account of how Verdyne became interested in the search for buried treasure—the lost meteor—together with some data regarding that famous object. I can best relate the story in Verdyne's own words as he told it to me, and as I wrote it down at the time.

John Verdyne's Story.

The diamond meteor was a legend in our family, and when other boys of my age were playing with blocks I was forming childish plans for its discovery. I remember even dedicating the funds in my saving bank to the proposition of financing the exploring expedition.

My father was a geologist who at one time occupied a chair in a leading university. Diamonds and their origin had long been his favorite study, and he heartily concurred in the theory of Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., perhaps the greatest living chemist and physicist, that diamond mines—technically termed "diamond pipes"—are bored by falling meteors, which are themselves the crucibles from celestial regions in which the gems are produced.

My father had read Sir William Crookes' address, delivered before the British Association at Kimberley, South Africa, during the meeting of which were exhibited fragments of an immense meteor whose main bulk was believed to be at the bottom of a mysterious cavity in Arizona. These fragments showed that they contained diamond crystals.

From that day, searching for the buried meteor became my father's life-work—to such an extent, in fact, that he became a monomaniac on the subject, resigned his chair, placed me at a boarding school, and removed to Arizona. My mother was dead, and such facts as I here relate were gleaned in part from my father's papers and partly from my childish recollections.

My father was handicapped in his quest by lack of capital; he had but a small annuity, and no one of any financial standing would listen to his scheme, calling it the dream of a crack-brained visionary. I think I was the only one, child as I was, who believed in his ultimate success; and I pleaded my hardest, but without result, to be taken with him.

For some two or three years my father roamed through Arizona, segregating himself from his own race, for the purpose of associating with the Apache and Navajo Indians who, he believed, knew more than any one else concerning the location of the diamond meteor. Layman and scientist alike had given up all idea of ever finding it; for they considered the story as nothing less than a myth. My father, however, had seen in the Indians' possession chunks of iron ore which he recognized as being of meteoric origin, and which, moreover, contained some gold and silver. Firm in his theory, he believed that at some greatly remote period a huge meteor had fallen in that locality, burying itself in the earth after shedding these scattered fragments.

I wish to state before I go further that my father's search was instituted solely in the interests of, and instigated solely by the dictates of science. He was fanatical to a degree in his loyalty to the Crookes theory, and above all he desired to prove it, to the confusion of the Vulcanites—who, as you know, maintain that diamond pipes are the result of ancient volcanic action, explosions of subterranean laboratories which are Nature's diamond factories.

In due time my father had good reason to suspect that he had accidentally chanced upon the vicinity of the lost meteor, and that its exact location, deep in the hills, was a secret carefully guarded by the Indians who resided there. This tribe was non-nomadic, and he had reason to believe that they had always lived in that locality, and that the meteor entered into their religious rites.

In fact, there was a legend handed down from generation to generation, which purported to relate how, many thousands of moons ago, the Great Spirit had sent a flaming message from the heavens, bidding them remain in the hunting grounds they had chosen; and that, so long as it remained inviolate and undimmed, so would their tribe flourish and prosper and become chiefs in the land.

Extraordinary care was taken to safeguard this natural shrine wherein lay buried the sacred message. Initially this was easily accomplished, but, as the centuries rolled past and the white man appeared with all his knowledge of converting the earth's treasures into gold, their medicine men prophesied that the time would come when the sacred place of the Great Spirit would be robbed of its message.

The tribe then passed certain stringent laws which made punishable with death the crime of exposing the location of the meteor.

I cannot vouch for the authenticity of this legend, but I found it as I have here transcribed it among my father's papers. He learned it from a half-breed with whom he had formed an intimacy; and this, together with his subsequent actions, only shows to what an extent his fanatical adherence to his quest had made inroads upon his principles. Here was he, a gentleman ordinarily most circumspect regarding the

selection of his associates, herding with a man of low origin who, I have reason to suspect, was a rascal of the most pronounced pattern.

In fact, it was not very long before my father and this half-breed, by name Dugan—a most incongruous name, by the way; one of his progentitors must have been Irish—arrived at an understanding. Dugan had discovered the location of the lost meteor, and, on my father foolishly letting fall some hint of the treasure it contained, entered into a partnership with him.

I am certain that my father had no idea of the value of the meteor; for he had no means of ascertaining its size. As I stated before, he was actuated solely by altruistic motives; but, being aware how the Indians regarded the sacred object, he knew it would be impossible to purchase information from them. Moreover, the meteor was located upon land reserved for them by the government. I am certain that my father merely desired to locate the mine, interest the government and the scientific world in his claims, and prove his theory.

To sustain this contention, I have in my possession the original agreement entered into with Dugan, in which it is merely stated that they share and share alike in the exploitation of the Meteor mine; Dugan supplying its location and my father his scientific knowledge and influence. It must be recollected that the half-breed was ignorant of the value of such knowledge as he possessed until his prospective partner hazarded a conjecture. By those who knew Professor Verdyne it will be readily understood how, in his unworldliness, together with his ignorance of the real value of the meteor, he assumed it for granted that his partner would be satisfied with a fair division of such money as my father might earn by the prestige accruing to him, incident upon proving the Crookes theory.

Dugan fulfilled his part of the agreement by leading my father to the mine. This was accomplished only with the greatest secrecy and difficulty. My father drew a map of the place. What subsequently followed is mere conjecture. I do not know whether the Indians had suspected my father of designs upon their shrine and deputed Dugan to pose as a decoy and thus lead him to his destruction; or whether the half-breed, discovering that his partner's conception of honor was at wide variance with his own, betrayed him to the tribe, or killed him on his own initiative and with his own hand.

I have reason to suspect the latter; for he kept from my father one very important piece of knowledge—that not only was it a religious principle of the Apache tribe to kill the betrayer of the secret, but also the recipient thereof, and such others as might come into possession of the information. As Dugan survived, this might have been due either to the fact that he assumed a given rôle, or that his tribesmen never discovered his treachery. It is enough that my father paid for his theory with his life.

The foregoing is a bitter page in my life, and I will not dilate upon it; suffice it to add that, although he is dead and thus unable to defend himself, there are now certain people who charge my father with intended fraud and theft. This is how their jealousy of my success evinces itself.

Although I was but ten years of age when I came into my father's few effects, and was, moreover, without money, friends, or influence, I dedicated my life to fitting myself to carry his enterprise to success, and to bring to justice his murderer or murderers.

I became an expert geologist and mining engineer. My father's papers had been found in a small hotel at Holbrook, Arizona, which he had made his headquarters. The map, however, was missing; and so I conjectured that it had been stolen from his person.

On my graduation I went to Holbrook. The particular tribe of Apaches of which my father had made mention had been decimated with time, and had been pushed westward. Their original reservation was now thrown open to the settler. Their medicine men had been correct; it was inevitable that the

resting place of the Great Spirit's message should come into possession of the children of the Great White Father. The chances, however, were a thousand to one against any person, other than myself, learning of the treasure that lay buried at that particular spot; and the Indians rested secure in their knowledge.

Eventually I located the meteor cavity, the description of which I found among my father's papers. It was about six hundred feet deep, and its sloping sides indicated that during centuries past soil washed in from the surrounding plains had decreased its original depth, to the uppermost side of the meteor, perhaps one fourth. To clear away this earth and disclose the meteor was the problem which confronted me.

The hole is about six miles south of Diabolo on the Santa Fé main line, and close to the banks of Diabolo Cañon. The surrounding country is as barren as a desert. A few miles away is the famous petrified forest, an area of hundreds of acres covered with solid stone trunks of gigantic trees.

For many miles about the meteor cavity, fragments of meteoric ore were strewn, some as large as a miner's shanty. I found them to contain iron, silver, gold and lead, besides diamond crystals. I found the yellow surface soil to be the same as that at the Kimberley mines; and, on removing refuse from the bottom of the pit, I discovered it to be filled with characteristic blue clay—diamond-bearing earth which continues to a depth of from five hundred to a thousand feet. There were no signs that this pit was of volcanic origin, and accordingly the meteor theory was sustained.

I secured an option on the land and hurried East, where, through the influence of Randall Lockhaven, I interested certain capitalists, and a partnership was formed. Even then I could only hazard a guess at the probable worth of the treasure, which only required to be excavated. And, indeed, at best the project was more or less of a gamble. Our only evidence was the Indian legend, the meteoric fragments, and the cavity—an oval one-third of a mile long by half a mile wide—of the same origin.

However, our success was stupendous. At a depth of two miles we struck the giant meteor, weighing many hundreds of tons, and worth its weight in solid gold; for it contained at least thirteen million dollars' worth of ores and diamonds. The theory that the chemical processes which meteorites undergo during their mad flight earthward are responsible for the formation of diamonds, has been proved. And that is the history of the Meteor mine.

Quentin Bone Resumes His Narrative.

CHAPTER II.

Such was Verdyne's mild recital of one of the greatest engineering feats and discoveries of the age, which he attempted and carried to success. As he omitted to give a detailed account of how his father, the late Professor Verdyne, met his death, or whether or not his murderers were brought to justice, I have refrained from asking. I conjectured that Verdyne had reason for not dilating upon the matter, and subsequent events sustained my judgment.

Verdyne related the above story to me on the occasion of my return to New York, which happened in the autumn of 1906. Nothing occurred within my knowledge which had any bearing on subsequent events until the spring following, when, under the date, May 6th, 1907, there is an entry in my diary which I here insert:

Visited "The Drift," Verdyne's Long Island place. Is being prepared for the season. Magnificent place. Am afraid Verdyne's living at too high a rate even for one of his reputed wealth. Looks worried, and presumably has no time for anything but business. Must get him to follow some of my dear father's advice on the merits of plain living and high thinking. Met his wife—will reserve my decision. Never believed in a man marrying one considerably his junior. It takes a kitten to amuse a kitten—a losing game for a grown cat.

Can't say I like Verdyne's secretary; appears as if he had Indian blood in his veins. Reminds me of a cultured rattlesnake. Understand he is a Carlisle graduate.

Now, I must admit that I had no logical reason for this last observation. The secretary in question, Mr. Curt Rabe, was a fine-looking fellow, straight and slim as a barber's pole, owning a singular sinuous grace and ease of movement peculiar to his race, together with a pleasing repose of manner which partook neither of haughty reserve nor of impudent confidence. There was nothing I particularly resented in him; yet I could not give him my approval. Perhaps this was instinctive; for I have long since catalogued Indians in the same class as reptiles. I have my cherished dislikes, and an Indian is one of them.

Regarding another statement in my diary I had, however, the evidence of my eyes to support me. Verdyne certainly appeared worried; and what was there to trouble a newly and evidently happily married man of his position—if not that a too close attention to business was demanded by his mode of living? He had his town house and country place, his yacht, his automobiles, and a staggering retinue of servants. However accommodating one's income may be, I have never believed in this manner of living; and I found occasion to convey a delicate warning to my old friend. He laughed in his characteristic fashion.

"Oh, it's a good thing to keep money in circulation—good for every one, Bone. If *you'd* loosen up a bit, your complexion would clear, and so would your philosophy. What's the use of piling up a fortune which some spendthrift relative will dissipate? That's the real rainy day we should provide against. My idea is to give each man his due—and a little more—while he's living and can enjoy it. No thanks to leave it when you're dead; for you can't take it with you, and your beneficiary may not need it then. I believe in getting the best and most out of life while we're here. We'll never have a chance to go back over the same road. You should get married, Quentin. It's the best character developer, the best tonic in the world."

"It may develop one's character the wrong way," I said. "Anyway, Heaven forbid. Wives are luxuries, these days."

"You old miser," he replied. "Everything in this world is a gamble, a risk; and the sooner you realize it the better. Where would I be if I hadn't taken a risk—I mean, the risk of asking Celia if she would marry me?"

But I felt that this was not the manner in which he intended concluding the sentence.

About this time I had my first intimation that Verdyne was not getting along with his business partners as harmoniously as might be desired. I noticed that Lockhaven, though he said nothing, did not evince toward Verdyne the old cordiality which formerly he had shown. Then there was Isidor Blum, a fat little man, unfortunately a member of my club, who owned a quarter interest in the Meteor mine. The fourth owner, I believe, was a young girl whose father had died, leaving her his sole heir, before his investment had become profitable.

These three, Lockhaven, Blum, and the father of the girl I have mentioned —I did not know her name—had financed the enterprise; Verdyne's sole capital, by which he became an equal partner, being his information and experience.

At first I was inclined to believe that Blum's ill will toward Verdyne was based on the belief that the latter had been let in too cheaply; in short, now that the enterprise had turned out so profitable, the financier deplored the fact that Verdyne had not paid for his interest in cash. This I considered rank injustice; for Verdyne alone had shown the way to millions, and, besides, had put all his hard-earned professional knowledge into the enterprise. He carried to success a feat which the average engineer would never have attempted. Money is not everything, and so, one night at the club, I told Blum.

Lockhaven and myself were the only other occupants of the smoking room, and Blum's last remark, which had called forth my reply, had been addressed to the former.

"No, money iss nod eferyt'ing," agreed Blum, anxiously polishing a huge solitaire which he had the bad taste to wear. "Money iss nod eferyt'ing. Quite right, Meester Bone. Money iss nod eferyt'ing. Money iss nod worth honesty and a square deal and——"

"Oh, shut up, Blum!" interposed Lockhaven irritably. "For heaven's sake, can't you let the thing drop? Call it dead, and be done with it. What the devil's the good of bleating around like this?"

Blum continued polishing his solitaire, regarding it as a mother might her first offspring; his birdlike eyes, set as in a great mass of dough, fastened on my nose—they never quite met one's eyes—while his heavy, tremulous lips moved while yet emitting no sound. Finally, without a word, he arose and waddled out.

I thought him gone, but presently he returned, armed with a high hat and umbrella, articles he effected during every day of the year despite climatic conditions. These, together with his rusty frock coat and long gray hair, imparted to him the general appearance of an indigent music teacher. In fact, he looked anything but a millionaire.

Lockhaven and I were facing each other across a card table over which hung a green lamp. Perhaps it was this ghostly glow which lent a pallor as of rage to the massive face of Blum. Standing by the table, he struck it a resounding blow with his umbrella, while his eyes concentrated themselves on Lockhaven's nose.

"I'll have it," he said, "if it put him or me in jail! Yes, *sir!* I'll have my rights—yes, *sir!*" And, after bestowing a rub on the solitaire, he marched out, holding his umbrella before him as though it were some sort of emblem.

Lockhaven broke into a laugh, and reached for a cigarette. "Exit the oddest figure in New York," he said. "Blum's a bloodthirsty old beggar if you happen to tread on his favorite corn."

"What's this about Verdyne?" said I. "Does he know what's being insinuated behind his back?"

"Thinking of telling him?" he asked, eying his shapely feet. "See here, Bone," he added more seriously, "I advise you to keep out of Verdyne's affairs—I mean, old man, it's poor pay going to a friend with dirty stories——"

"But you and I are his friends, Randall, and Blum's insinuations——"

"Damn it all! They're more than insinuations," said he. "Blum says Verdyne isn't honest—well, between you and me, Quentin, he isn't; and that's the beginning and end of it."

"Don't believe it!" said I flatly. "And I'm surprised, to say the least, that you evidently do."

Lockhaven selected a cigarette with some care.

"You might as well know the truth as the covert charges that Blum disseminates," he said at length. "I tell you, Quentin, you never know a man until he's been tested. Honesty has its limits, like everything else. The fire of a half-million dollar diamond will burn its way through the virtuous armor of nine mortals out of ten—and the tenth will be blind."

"You mean," said I, "that Verdyne has held out—taken as a bonus one of the Meteor gems?"

"Put it that way if you like," said Lockhaven. "It's an uncut stone worth at least five hundred thousand—three times the value of the biggest diamond ever dug from the Meteor."

"Of course you can prove this, Lockhaven?"

"See here, Bone," he returned, arising, "I've known Verdyne as long as you have, and I wouldn't say what I have if I hadn't proof. Nor have I said this through any feeling of injury or spite. Better hear it from me than a magnified version from some one else; and, besides, I want your help in smothering the matter. I know you won't spread it, and I'll try to have Blum shut his mouth. It's a matter strictly between the owners of the Meteor, and of course I've been out of it from the start.

"We know beyond doubt that Verdyne is in possession of the stone, that he has acknowledged it came from the

Meteor. He gave it to his wife on her last birthday. He has made no mention of it. It has been appropriated by him as a bonus, perquisite—anything you like. That's all. So far as I am concerned, it is unnecessary to say there will be no persecution or suit; and I will do my utmost to make Blum take the same view."

"You were dining with the Verdynes the other night, and you have been a frequent visitor at The Drift," said I. "This matter, then, has made no difference in your regard toward Verdyne?"

"That's rather a difficult ethical question, Quentin," he replied. "I don't know how I really stand in the matter, for I've been a bit timid about examining myself. I know Verdyne stole—to use the brutal legal term—the diamond; yet, as you say, I continue to associate with him, not only in business but socially. Does a fault, even a crime, necessarily change the understanding existing between friends? I mean, does a single mistake, as in this case, change all those attributes, both of mind and person, which prompted one's regard and liking?"

"I understand," I replied, "and I'm glad that, owning such irrefutable knowledge as you must, you are tolerant to regard it in that light. Verdyne's our old college mate, and we must take steps to protect his name. Of course, you know more than I do, and I fully realize how the most honest can be led astray by the unholy power of a diamond of the size and beauty of the one in question. As for me, I will not believe in Verdyne's dishonesty——"

"Quite right," said he. "That's only to be expected. I did the same. And now, let us drop the matter. I'll be the last man on earth to let Verdyne know that I am cognizant of what he has done; so you will consider this conversation as strictly *entre nous*."

"Would you mind telling me," I said, as a last word on the subject, "how you and Mr. Blum became aware of the matter?"

Lockhaven hesitated. "I can't, Quentin. There is no one in whom I would rather confide, and in a measure it is your due; for you are one of Verdyne's oldest friends. But it would be a breach of honor—you understand that? I can only say that I made the strictest investigation."

"Don't you think it would be better to go to Verdyne and put it to him fairly?"

"No," said Lockhaven decidedly. "As I said before, I'm out of the matter, and I couldn't bring myself to do such a thing."

"Well," said I, "I'm not an interested party; so I may do it. I think it would be the kindest and wisest course——"

"Perhaps, Quentin. But remember you have Mrs. Verdyne to consider. It's always the woman who suffers most in matters of this description. At all costs she must never know of, or suffer for, her husband's fault. If you feel you must speak, leave my name out of it, at any rate. I've been careful not to let Verdyne suspect that I know anything. I wish I'd never possessed the knowledge."

"I'll act very carefully, if I act at all," I replied.

Before I arrive at the narration of those remarkable events inaugurated during the now celebrated week-end party at The Drift, I find there is one other incident which I deem it advisable to set down here.

About a week after the above recorded conversation with Lockhaven—which, according to my diary, took place on the night of May 25th, 1907—I see by the same memorandum that I escorted home from Mrs. Wetherby's drawing-room a certain Mrs. Montague Chenevix.

Well, there is nothing remarkable in that; for, although anything but a lady's man, I never ignore the obligations imposed by social etiquette and polite society.

I was not very well acquainted with this Mrs. Chenevix, a divorcée of a dangerously provocative type. I find there is something about these pale, narrow-hipped, languid ladies, with their half-veiled, dreamy eyes, that

vaguely disturbs me. Though far from being garrulous, I dislike silence in another—the sort of chronic silence which one instinctively resents—and I foolishly strive to maintain a conversation; with the result that I generally find myself delivering a monologue on subjects I never intended discussing.

The evening was unusually enticing, and Mrs. Chenevix, dismissing her motor, suggested that we walk to her Madison Avenue home. I have never quite understood how I thus came to be her cavalier for so protracted a period, or why I should find myself talking on that subject which of all subjects I had determined to keep secret. I was brought to myself, as it were, by her exclaiming:

"Really, Mr. Bone—five hundred thousand? Is it worth so much? Frankly, I believe you've been listening to fairy tales. Men are so gullible. I've found they are slaves to exaggeration—far more so than women."

"And I have found," said I, "that women are more incredulous than men. Fundamentally, however they may profess to the contrary, they believe only what they discover for themselves."

"Then I am an exception, Mr. Bone," she returned, looking up into my eyes —her own were really remarkably beautiful, and they suddenly opened to their widest, like those of a little child—"for I really do believe what you have told me."

"But I have told you nothing!" I returned, amazed.

"O-h-h!" She laughed, and I cannot describe the luxurious, caressing witchery of her laugh. "Talk of women having secrets! If Athos and Porthos are mentioned, isn't it only logical to guess Aramis?"

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Chenevix?"

"I mean, if Messrs. Bone and Lockhaven are concerned, isn't it only natural to suppose that Mr. Verdyne is the gentleman who gave his wife a birthday present of a five hundred thousand dollar diamond?"

"Mrs. Chenevix," said I, "I must permit such guesses as you care to make to go unanswered."

"But I'm so curious," she sighed. "You've whetted my appetite. I really will have to be so rude as to ask Mr. Verdyne——"

"For heaven's sake, don't!"

I must say she allowed my stupidity to pass unnoticed.

"I *knew* you were going to tell me, Mr. Bone, even if it *was* a confidence that——"

"A confidence, Mrs. Chenevix?"

"Why, yes; otherwise you wouldn't have taken the trouble to tell me in so nice a way."

"Well, it was," I admitted lamely. "I inadvertently learned it from a third you I'd feel injured that Mr. Verdyne wishes it considered a private matter until he desires to make it public. I know you will consider his inclinations."

"Certainly, Mr. Bone. But if I were you I'd feel injured that Mr. Verdyne should confide in Mr. Lockhaven, and not in you."

"Mr. Lockhaven did not hear of it from Mr. Verdyne."

"O-h-h!" she said. Then, her eyes alight with mischief, she continued: "Don't you think, Mr. Bone, that men make less reliable confidants than women?"

I reluctantly admitted this fact.

Reviewing my chat with Mrs. Chenevix, I find that we had arrived at the Meteor diamond through a natural sequence of subjects which, taken singly, were entirely foreign to the matter. To the best of my recollection, we began by discussing the past season's opera, the new Cosmopolitan tenor, Reggie Beresford's coaching project, and many similar banal and conventional matters, which led us back to the opera and to a hazarded estimate of the wealth contained in the noted "diamond horseshoe."

Now, one of my companion's characteristics was an irritating and patronizing ambition to overtop every one else conversationally. No matter who or what one knew, she was certain to know some one or something better. If you casually mentioned that Mrs. So-and-so had done this or that, Mrs.

Chenevix either knew a Mrs. Somebody who had grown old doing that particular thing, or in some remote period she had been through the whole game herself. This inexhaustible experience of hers ranged from an operation for appendicitis to a world tour.

I had been effectually squelched on several subjects, until, in speaking of diamonds, I happened to mention that I knew a Parisian who owned a blue stone valued at over a hundred thousand dollars. Mrs. Chenevix promptly responded that she was intimately acquainted with the owner of the largest and most valuable diamond in the world—one that outshone the noted Kohinoor. Here was my opportunity of rising triumphant from a squelch. I begged to differ, and stated that the largest and most valuable diamond in existence, known only to a limited circle, had been given by a friend of mine to his wife as a birthday present. The rest of the conversation I have recorded.

I relate the foregoing in order that I may be absolved from any intention of wilfully disclosing a matter which it had been intended to keep secret. It will now be understood that, so far as I was aware, six people of our circle knew about the Meteor diamond. These were Verdyne and his wife, Lockhaven, Blum, Mrs. Chenevix and myself. It can be assumed that there were no others; for Verdyne had said nothing to Lockhaven or to Isidor Blum, and naturally Mrs. Verdyne would not act contrary to her husband's wishes.

My diary now brings me to the week-end party at The Drift.

CHAPTER III.

The first entry, for Friday, June 5th, 1907—the day of my arrival at The Drift—I find is, in the main, an unmannerly criticism which both pains and surprises me. I must have been suffering with a headache. The entry in part runs:

Wish Verdyne would prune his visiting list. Wouldn't have accepted had I known that Isidor Blum and Mrs. Chenevix were to be present. There is also an odious little French doctor by the name of Lefèvre, who had the bad form to disagree openly with my opinion of Corot. And there is a brace of maiden ladies, twins, who look and dress bewilderingly alike and in a distressingly youthful manner. Lockhaven is here. He is sticking up nobly for his friendship. The Indian-looking secretary is still apparent. I am becoming interested in Mrs. Verdyne.

The foregoing is practically the gist of my observations gleaned during my first night at The Drift, a place modestly termed a villa, but which, though not uncomfortably large, was surrounded by extensive grounds which, besides innumerable fountains and shady walks, contained a tennis court, a swimming pool and a nine-hole golf course. From the house proper, which stood on an eminence, could be seen the distant Connecticut shore, for The Drift was situated at but a short walking distance from the Sound, and from my window I could discern the *Viper*, Verdyne's steam yacht, swinging lazily at her anchor like some huge, white, transient sea bird asleep on its bed of deepest blue.

I arrived unexpectedly late, and was immediately hailed by Williams, Verdyne's chauffeur.

"Sorry we'll have to wait a bit, sir," he apologized, ushering me into a gray car, "but the missis sent down her maid with me on a message, and she hasn't shown up yet. Mrs. Verdyne regrets giving you the inconvenience of sharing the car with her maid, but she can sit beside the wheel with me, sir." He seemed relieved at getting this message safely off his mind.

As I was about to reply, who should appear from the station but Mrs. Chenevix!

"Oh, my dear Mr. Bone, how do you do?" she said, somewhat stirred out of her usual state of chronic ennui. "Surely you are my good angel. Didn't you see me on the train? I've been so rushed, and I thought I would have to take one of those hired hacks."

I made room in the tonneau, and, Mrs. Verdyne's maid appearing, we whirled off through a vista of wide

tree-swept avenues, the tang of the distant sea coming down to us on the wind of our speed.

"Such a change from the city!" said Mrs. Chenevix, with a sigh, as she snuggled against the cushions. "I delayed going abroad in order to spend a week or so at The Drift. Mr. Verdyne affirms that our country can outstrip the Continent in everything but ruins; that we can find equal enjoyment nearer home if we only care to look. But I go abroad every year because it's the thing—and it's cheaper. I'd hate to confess what I've lost at bridge. My luck's as bad as Mrs. Verdyne's—of course you've met her?" Then, as I answered in the affirmative: "Don't you think her charming—and so interestingly peculiar? I have often wondered to what extent husbands are responsible for their wives' vices. The trouble in teaching an unsophisticated person to gamble, or anything like that, is that they never know when to stop. But Mr. Lockhaven will see that she doesn't exceed the speed limit——"

"I think," said I, "that Mr. Lockhaven will naturally consider Mr. Verdyne entirely capable of managing his own domestic affairs."

She did not acknowledge this hint by so much as a flicker of her pretty eyelids.

"Oh, of course! But Mr. Lockhaven is so wise and kind, and it's nice for a woman to feel that she has such a spiritual guardian hovering in the offing," she said demurely. "You didn't know Mrs. Verdyne before her marriage, did you? No? U-m-m, I'm so sorry; for I wished you were capable of placing me in a position where I could deny—— What a charming view!"

If Mrs. Chenevix desired to throw me a bait to whet curiosity and prompt an exchange of confidences, she did not succeed. I agreed that the view was charming, and let the Verdynes' affairs rest where they were. However, as I had been abroad during the time of my friend's marriage, and was a stranger to town gossip, I could not help wondering what it was that my lovely companion so virtuously desired to be in a position to deny.

Regarding Mrs. Chenevix, as I have said, I knew very little. New York has many circles, and asks few questions. All Verdyne's set demanded was a certain standard, certain behavior, and a certain income—or the successful simulation of such. Mrs. Chenevix lived in good style, with an antiquated aunt for chaperon; made a clever, tactful hostess and an accommodating guest, and always owned the latest thing in gossip, scandal, worthy information or fashion. Where she came from, who were her antecedents, I did not know, ask, or care; for your real New Yorker is an imported product. On returning from my long residence abroad I found her one of the set, and that was enough.

As we halted under the long porte-cochère an incident occurred which, trivial as it then seemed, subsequently assumed a more vital importance.

Williams jumped down to open the tonneau door, and Mrs. Verdyne's maid, who appeared to be in a great hurry, whispered to him that she would not wait to be driven around to the servants' entrance. She accordingly alighted and, running up the steps, produced from her chatelaine bag a key with which she opened the door for us. In her haste a small slip of paper was dislodged from the bag and fell fluttering to the steps, where it lay seemingly unnoticed by all but myself. Mechanically I picked it up, intending to restore it to its owner; but, Mrs. Chenevix at that moment diverting my attention, I placed it in my pocket and, for the time being, forgot it.

I gave myself into the hands of Chew, the butler, a majestic imported dignitary of the old English school, who led me to my room, saying: "The mistress is dressing, and the master has not yet come 'ome."

"Your master is a very busy man—much too busy," I replied. "Take my advice, Mr. Chew, and don't be a business man."

"Quite right, sir," he agreed. "The 'umble 'ave their own compositions, as the Bible says."

I always got along capitally with this awesome personage who, I suspected, held me in more esteem than either his master or mistress. I felt that he entertained for them a lofty and tolerant contempt; for they, while ambitious to transplant the species *Brittanicus domesticus,* were ignorant of the manner in which it should be treated. My long residence abroad had imparted that highly esteemed knowledge, so that I could impose upon the species after the approved manner of the best old English families. In short, Verdyne regarded his servants too much as human beings whose franchise was equal with his own.

Dinner would not be until eight; so, after dressing, I decided to idle about the grounds.

Descending the stairs, I was compelled to pass Mrs. Verdyne's dressing room, situated at the turn of the corridor. The door was closed, but I heard her voice and another which I identified as belonging to her French maid. Before I could hasten out of earshot, I overheard my hostess exclaim: "You must get it, Célestine. Go immediately, before it closes!"

Afterward, as I stood talking with Lockhaven and a group of guests, I saw Williams in the car whirling Célestine down the white road which led into the town. Just then Mrs. Verdyne appeared, and I hastened to pay my respects.

Lockhaven had been cornered by an elderly, vivacious female—Angelina Tweedie, an ardent Ultrascientist who sought a convert in every acquaintance, and whose sister, Agnes, an exact replica in every respect, had buttonholed Doctor Lefèvre. Lockhaven found emancipation impossible, short of physical violence; and, the eddy of guests surrounding Mrs. Verdyne dividing as I approached, I found myself alone with her.

I imagined that I detected a forced gayety in her manner, although, being youthful and owning an abounding vitality, she was naturally of such a temperament. We had half an hour to kill before dining; so she proposed showing me the new summer house which had recently been erected according to her own designs.

It was the first time I had been alone with Mrs. Verdyne; the first intimacy of any kind.

The summer house, at a distance of some two hundred yards from The Drift, was situated on an eminence, concealed from the former by a grove of maples, which commanded all four points of the compass. Far below me I could see each successive winding of the road which led into the town; I could even discern the station, and a fleecy cloud of steam as a train pulled in.

"That's the six-forty-five train from Long Island City—it should be Jack's train," said my companion, shading her eyes. "You begin to see the beauties of this Sister Anne abode, Mr. Bone? I can sit here with a book against his arrival, either by land or by sea." She pointed to the west, where against the far horizon the *Viper* lay at rest, a thin column of smoke curling from her yellow smokestack.

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "Steam up! Thinking of a moonlight cruise?"

"I don't know," she replied slowly, her eyes on the yacht. "My dominion does not extend to the sea. All else I have—perhaps. I am a very poor sailor, and I take no interest in boats."

"It is a very extensive and glorious realm for one so young," I said, looking about me.

"You speak as if youth were a reproach, Mr. Bone."

"Perhaps I'm envious."

"Rubbish!" She smiled. "Jack's only two years younger than you, and I don't consider forty hopeless. Few men are worth knowing before that age; the ones who are—well, I've never met them, nor wish to."

"And women, Mrs. Verdyne?"

"How should I know? I'm not one yet, nor ever will be. I'm never to grow up. I'm always to be a child. But I think my sex should either be caught in their teens or their forties. The intermediate stages are risky. You

can teach a kitten and coax a middle-aged cat."

"Isn't that *lèse majesté* against your sex, Mrs. Verdyne?"

"No, only against some of its members, Mr. Bone. You have the same type in your own. Show me a woman who disparages her sex, and I'll show you something not worth showing."

"It seems," said I, "that this realm is ruled over by a sovereign who, despite her years, has gained understanding. Your humble and obedient servant, madam."

"Call it friend," she replied, suddenly grave, and giving me her hand. "I wish Jack's oldest friend to be also mine."

"May all your wishes be as easily gratified, Mrs. Verdyne," I replied, for I had given her my first real liking.

"As for realms," she added slowly, looking about her, "there are ones, other than such as this, which sweethearts and wives prize most, Mr. Bone. Ones over which sometimes they only hold nominal sovereignty——" She broke off, and called my attention to a motor breezing its way up the winding road.

It was the gray car, with Célestine beside the chauffeur, and Verdyne in the tonneau. We could discern them distinctly, although, owing to the serpentine character of the road, it would be some time before they would arrive at The Drift.

"Come," said I, "let us be down at the gates to meet him. Sister Anne has been rewarded."

But my companion hung back, a sudden and unwonted color in her cheek, a vague constraint in her manner.

"Unfortunately domestic affairs are first, Mr. Bone. I must return to the house. Won't you please go alone?" Nodding a bright adieu, she turned and descended the hill, taking a short cut which circled the side facing the Sound.

Vaguely perplexed at this move, I stood for a moment watching her slim, strangely girlish figure and the glory of her burnished hair which won an added splendor from the dying sun. As she appeared again on the farther side of the willow grove, which had temporarily encompassed her, I saw Lockhaven emerge from the adjacent swimming pool and accompany her to the house where Mrs. Chenevix—I identified her wonderful yellow gown—encountered them. The trio remained together for a moment, and then Mrs. Verdyne went into the house.

As I had completed half the return journey, the car dashed under the porte-cochère, and Verdyne was greeting his guests. As before, the dark-eyed French maid did not wait to be driven around to the rear, but, risking a reprimand, took advantage of the momentary general confusion and flew up the steps into the house.

I can relate the evening's subsequent events in less detail.

I found my host abstracted, worried, and victim of a bad headache. He retired earlier than usual, leaving his guests to the care of his wife.

I never play cards, so Doctor Lefèvre and I sat on the veranda. The little doctor was master of an amazing variety of subjects, and I enjoyed his society exceedingly until we disagreed on the standing of Corot.

Escaping from Lefèvre, I was ambushed by the Tweedie twins, and, after sustaining a severe fire of Ultrascience, successfully executed a flank movement and retired to my room.

As I passed through the foyer I saw Lockhaven and his hostess, over the bridge table, battling against Mrs. Chenevix and a grandmotherly, middle-aged gentleman by the name of Melrose. The stakes were a dollar a point, and the last named couple were losing heavily.

A similar battle was being waged between young Rider—a clean-faced boy just out of Yale—Isidor Blum, a Miss Brown, and Mrs. Anstruther, a portly dowager whose third husband, before dying, had considerately washed clean his sins by making a million out of soap.

I have now mentioned and classified all the guests.

My bedroom, as I have stated, faced

the Sound and therefore the western walk, which surmounted the hill on which was situated the arbor. My windows gave upon a wide veranda which circled the house, and below this was another, on which opened the apartments of my host and hostess.

As is often the case, all inclination for sleep left me once I had prepared for bed; so, drawing a chair to the open French window, I sat and smoked.

Presently my wandering attention was attracted to the distant moonlit bay. Up into the star-speckled heavens the *Viper* was sending a shower of sparks from her smokestack, and again I wondered idly why steam should be kept up in her boilers.

At this moment a slowly moving object came into the angle of my vision. A figure had emerged from the willow grove, and even at that distance and in the uncertain light I had no difficulty in recognizing the secretary, Curt Rabe. He halted in the shadow of the trees, his eyes evidently busy with the distant yacht.

A sound now attracted my attention to the veranda below, and, yielding to a sudden impulse which was quite inexplicable, I emerged upon my own and looked over the railing.

Below me stood John Verdyne, dressed in a business sack suit, a pair of night field glasses at his eyes. Whether he was watching the *Viper* or the secretary I could not determine—perhaps neither. He stood for a moment and then, before I could make my presence known, reëntered his room by way of the window.

Almost at the same time the bridge party broke up, and I heard the guests, laughing and talking, seeking the grounds for a promenade before retiring. Young Rider and Miss Brown passed in review below me and swung away toward the golf links, while Mrs. Anstruther, a wheezy chaperon, waddled in their wake, talking in an earsplitting falsetto to Isidor Blum, who was arrayed in his high hat and umbrella, upon the much-mooted question of when is it permissible, in a no-trump hand, to disregard your partner's lead.

Then came the grandmotherly Melrose, fast imprisoned between the bulwarks of the Tweedie twins; and finally, after an interval, Lockhaven and his hostess. When the latter couple came to the path which led up the hill to the summer house, they halted, and from his actions I took it that Lockhaven was evidently proposing something which she refused. Finally he shrugged his shoulders as though abandoning the effort, and they continued in the wake of the rest.

I waited for Mrs. Chenevix, but she did not appear. I had momentarily forgotten the secretary, but I saw that he was still standing in the shadow of the willow grove. Now, however, I fancied that his face was turned from the sea, and I did not doubt but that he had been a witness of all I myself had seen.

CHAPTER IV.

According to my diary it was on the following day, Saturday, June 6th, 1907, that I received from John Verdyne himself some further information regarding the Meteor diamond. He and Mrs. Chenevix had defeated Miss Brown and myself in a mixed foursome, and, while the ladies went in to dress for lunch, he and I sought the veranda and the ministrations of the dignified Chew.

We were on the western side of the house, and could see Mrs. Verdyne and Lockhaven standing off the Tweedie twins at the nets, while the voices of young Rider and Melrose resounded from the white marble building which held the swimming pool.

Verdyne's eyes had been fastened for some time upon his wife, and indeed she made an alluring picture.

"By the way, Jack," I said, "I'm not inquisitive as a rule, but would you mind telling me why a man pleads a headache, presumably retires, changes his evening clothes, and arrays himself in a sack suit plus field glasses at twelve-thirty, midnight?"

He eyed me for a moment. "Don't say you're not inquisitive, Quentin;

that's making modesty a vice. You rival a flea in enterprise. You should be ashamed of yourself—spying on your host."

"That's not answering the question."

"Oh, it's easily answered in a word—business." He laughed. "We haven't a very good railroad schedule, and if I have to be in town very early I make use of the *Viper* and I signal Captain Mock to have her ready."

I let this explanation pass. "You've too much business," I said. "It should be only the means to an end. We are apt to miss the real things in life by rushing after those which we consider necessities. I'm going to be very frank, but the real thing in your life is your wife, and were I blessed with such a one I'd let money grubbing go hang, and make her my sole interest."

This was all I could say, and it fell on fallow ground.

"And don't you think you can best serve a wife by this?" he laughed, waving an arm about the estate. "Women are only children, Quentin, and constantly need new toys. Keep 'em supplied; that's the only way to keep 'em contented. What you term money grubbing is what makes romance possible."

"I'd place women on a higher level than that occupied by children and animals," I said, feeling my old temper getting the better of me. "Toys be hanged. They want love, and the confidence given to an equal——"

"Phew!" he cut in, his old, idle, bantering manner to the fore. "You change your philosophy with your linen. Only the other day the slogan was: 'Down with women!'"

"The man whose philosophy doesn't change," said I, "is a narrow-minded bigot. And I tell you the sooner you realize that women aren't children who require new toys, such as the half-million dollar diamond you gave your wife——"

There! My infernal temper had made me break a confidence.

Verdyne was carefully blowing into the stem of his pipe. He turned and eyed me steadily. "I want to know who told you about the Meteor diamond?"

"It was a confidence," I said, "and I fully intended keeping it."

"Confidences have done for more people under the sun than anything else," he returned dryly. "You'll do me a real service by telling me. I want to know."

"I can't tell you from whom I heard it, Jack. That's straight. I've given my word. But, now that I've broached the subject, I might as well continue; for it's only right you should know. I know Mr. Blum considers he has been unfairly dealt with—that, in short, he should have an equal share in the diamond."

Verdyne smoked for a time in silence. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I don't know. Of course I don't believe it, and yet I thought you should be given a chance to defend your name; for your silence argued that you were ignorant of what they say."

"I was silent," he said, "because I know man's cupidity and covetousness. The diamond did originally come from the Meteor mine; but not one of the owners have any claim upon it. I cannot tell how it came into my possession. What I suspected has happened. Because I kept the matter secret, Mr. Blum thinks I wish to defraud him out of his share. That's what greed of gold will do for a man!"

"Why don't you tell how you got it?" I asked. "That would end all this talk. It came from the mine; you did not pay for it, did not mention it——"

"And so it's only natural to suspect me of being a thief, eh?" he asked angrily. "Now, you listen to me. My private affairs are my own—understand? If Blum and the rest of them think me a thief, they can be damned; and I'll tell 'em so once they're quit of my hospitality. As for the diamond, it stays in my wife's possession, and I'll make no explanation whatever regarding it."

I had raised a fine storm, and I saw that only the dictates imposed by hos-

pitality kept Verdyne from going to Mr. Blum and speaking out his mind.

"I'm sorry I said anything," I began. "It's unnecessary, I hope, to state that Lockhaven and I would never think of doubting you——"

"*You* might not," he interrupted cynically, "for you've no interest in the matter. I tell you I've found that it's a mighty strong friendship that can overcome personal greed."

"Then," I replied, "I should think you wouldn't keep a fortune in carbon lying about your house. It would tempt a saint, and there are many respectable people who would exchange their souls for it."

"You must remember," he said, "that I thought no one knew of its presence here but my wife and me. I'll take it to the bank with me on Monday. I'd hate to pose as a public corrupter of morals. I'll tell you, however, that I don't prize the stone for its intrinsic value, and though it's worth a fortune no one will realize a cent from it. No thief, however he might think to the contrary, could profit by stealing it. I'm telling you this so you won't be tempted."

"Thanks," I laughed. "It must be a curious stone."

"It is. Perhaps I'll show it to you some day. It's the sacred stone of a certain tribe of Apache Indians, and to my knowledge it has already cost two lives. If there's anything in legends it will cost more. We'll see——"

Mrs. Chenevix appeared suddenly from the angle of the veranda, and Verdyne and I arose and went in to dress.

On the way to my room I overtook Lockhaven.

"I say," he began, stopping me and lowering his voice, "what do you think Blum's up to? He says he asked himself here for the sole reason of asking Verdyne pointblank about the diamond. He's wild to see it. What shall we do? I'm saying nothing about Blum's beastly bad taste. That's the worst of business—one has to associate with pigs."

"I'll tell you, Lockhaven. I'd let Blum have it out with Verdyne—the sooner the better. It's the last time he'll ever enter this house, anyway." And I related the gist of my conversation with my host.

"Whew!" he said. "That's rather rough on me, old man——"

"I didn't say you told me, Randall. To my knowledge, Verdyne isn't aware that you know anything about the diamond. I told him that it was unnecessary to say that you and I would not doubt him. He will make no explanation, but I give you his word that none of the owners of the Meteor mine have any claim upon the stone. Your informant has led you into a bad mistake."

Lockhaven was silent. "Well, let's say no more about it," he replied, somewhat irritably. "I told you I was out of it. Blum can do what he likes."

Succeeding a rather cool morning there followed a blazing hot day of the heavy, stifling variety not uncommon in early June. Most of the younger set sought the bathing grounds and the cool sanctuary of the sea. Lockhaven, Mrs. Verdyne, Lefèvre and one of the Tweedie twins went motoring to Oyster Bay. Verdyne and Mrs. Chenevix, solitary slaves to that time-wasting game called chess, sought the cool shade and quiet of the summer house, while I escaped the machinations of the other twin, and secreted myself in a hammock swinging in an obscure nook of the veranda. I carried a heavy classical tome as an excuse for a nap.

Before I dozed off, I saw Isidor Blum and the secretary, deep in conversation, ascend the steps and enter the house.

I must have slept for some time; for when I awoke the shadows had lengthened perceptibly, and now the evening was bringing in its wake a cool breeze from the distant Sound—the variety of breeze that generally heralds an electric storm.

Voices had mingled vaguely in my dreams, and as I gained coherent perception of environment I realized that these were proceeding from a room on

my left—I subsequently identified it as the library—whose Venetian blinds were closed against the day's warmth. I had no difficulty in recognizing the nasal tones of Mr. Blum and Verdyne's rather quiet, drawling bass. From the ensuing dialogue I gathered that the former had carried out his intention, and that the subject of the Meteor diamond had reached its climax.

"Vell, at least you vill show it to me," said Blum, his voice tremulous with greed, disappointed desires and curiosity. "Diamonds are my beesness. Perhaps I vill buy it."

"It's not for sale at any price," said Verdyne quietly, "and I won't show it to you, Mr. Blum."

"Mr. Verdyne," replied the other, evidently goaded to his limit, "you are my host; I am your guest. Ve vill say no more. But I tell you as a vriend that I consider it due the owners of the mine to know someding about this diamond vich you say came from the property; and if you still refuse, I tell you as a vriend that I vill take steps to protect our interests."

"Very good, Mr. Blum," said Verdyne, and I rather admired him for remembering his position as host and saying nothing further.

I saw Blum emerge upon the veranda, his face pale with anger, sucking at a black cigar. He looked like a patriarch the dignity of whose beard has been affronted.

I will pass over the uninteresting events succeeding dinner and preceding bedtime. Verdyne and Doctor Lefèvre sat over their wine long after the rest of us gentlemen had left the dining room. The bridge tournament was resumed, and I spent a dismal hour with the Misses Tweedie who successfully ambushed me.

Perhaps it was due merely to the climatic conditions, but I felt strangely depressed. The air was charged with electricity, and it appeared as though the other guests partook in a measure of my feeling of unrest. I heard Lockhaven laugh unusually often, and both Mrs. Chenevix and my hostess evinced a rather feverish gayety. Indeed, the latter was far from looking her best; her eyes, at least, testified to the fact that she had not slept very well on the previous night.

Through the open door of the dining room I saw the silent and dignified Chew administering to the wants of his master and Doctor Lefèvre.

At length I escaped to my room, leaving the company as I have described it. It was eleven o'clock. As I reached the corridor on which my room was situated, I heard a door open softly, and, looking over the balustrade, I discerned the slim figure of the secretary standing by Mrs. Verdyne's dressing room. Then I heard Célestine, the French maid, humming a little *chanson* as she ascended the stairs. Mr. Rabe now left his post and passed her with a familiar greeting. He was evidently on his way to the library.

Such were the night's peaceful and uninteresting happenings, which were to be followed by the strange and, I may say, terrible events of the early morning.

CHAPTER V.

Taking a book, I lay down fully dressed on the bed, intending to read myself into a state of drowsiness. I have found that the eye tires by concentrating on parallel lines, and that thus sleep is induced. Naturally, some authors possess this faculty above others. My particular favorite—Carlyle, by the way—must have possessed great potentiality, for I fell asleep while reading.

Suddenly in my dreams I became conscious that some one was regarding me fixedly. I awoke with a start, to find myself standing in front of the bureau mutely scanning my own reflection. What had seemed a few seconds of oblivion had in reality been almost two hours; for it was now after one o'clock.

I felt greatly disturbed, and not a little frightened. In early youth I had been a somnambulist, and it had necessitated constant care and attention

to break me of the pernicious habit. Many a time in the past I had awakened to find myself standing at my mother's bedside or in some remote quarter of the house, alone with my sudden fears. I had always been highly strung, unduly sensitive; and our doctor predicted that, as I gained in strength and years and mingled more with my fellow man than with books, I would gradually outgrow the habit. This prediction eventually proved to be correct; for I remember no case of sleep walking since my fifteenth year.

Now, however, I had a positive proof of an incipient attack of my old malady. My nerves must be getting into bad shape again—either too much tea or tobacco; for I could not be a victim of overwork; that is, in its literal sense.

Pondering on the unpleasant phenomenon, I hastily undressed, switched off the light and jumped into bed.

I was awakened by a terrific peal of thunder, and arose hastily to close my window against the torrential rain. The Sound was illuminated by incessant sheets of lightning which afforded me glimpses of the *Viper* and another vessel—one considerably smaller, which I had not remembered seeing before, lying close in to the shore.

I drew the shades and switched on the light; for I own a childish terror of thunderstorms which precluded all idea of sleep. According to the clock on the mantelpiece, it was two A. M., and the other occupants of the house were presumably deep in that sleep which is man's heaviest. I threw on a dressing gown, drew a chair under the light, and sat down to resume my reading.

Hardly had I turned the first page when there came a crash of thunder which caused my heart to leap and struggle like a living thing fighting for liberty. I sat sweating with fear. I was certain that the bolt had struck somewhere in the grounds, and instinctively I drew aside the shade in order to discover the possible damage. I saw that a large oak standing close to the house had been riven from top to bottom.

Another great sheet of electricity followed, illuminating the Sound as by a flashlight, and on the heaving waters of the little bay I discerned a small launch approaching the wharf.

"Some one running for shelter," I thought, and returned to my book, rather resenting the fact that no other guest was awake to help me share the loneliness of the night. I had half a mind to knock up Lockhaven, whose room was next mine, but I resisted this impulse as being cowardly.

A pipe is a helpful and comforting companion, and I soon had mine charged, only to discover that the electric safety lighter was out of order, and that matches were lacking. Now, initially I had no great desire to smoke; but no sooner did I find that its accomplishment was seemingly impossible than straightway the desire became paramount and all compelling. Devotees of the habit will understand when I add that I determined to secure a match at all hazards. As a last resort I would even awake Lockhaven. In fact, I went so far as to knock at his door, and was greeted with a hearty snore.

Before risking arousing the house with my importunities, I decided to try the library, where I remembered noting on the desk a most accommodating bowl of matches; for Verdyne, like myself, was an inveterate smoker, and surrounded himself with these necessary articles.

I shuffled downstairs as noiselessly as possible, with the aid of the night light burning dimly in the lower hall; made my way to the library, and switched on the light.

The moment I entered the room I had been conscious of a draught of air, and I now saw that one of the French windows facing me was wide open. My eyes fell on the black oak desk at whose end I was standing. The brass inkstand was open, a pen resting across it, and on the scarlet blotter lay a sheet of note paper. It contained the words "Sunday morning" and "Dearest." I recognized Verdyne's writing, and wondered why he had not finished the letter which had evidently just been

commenced. Here something else entered the angle of my vision—a pair of shoes protruding from the far corner of the desk.

I pushed the chair aside.

Verdyne, dressed in a sack suit, was lying on his back, his hands clenched tightly over his breast. There was blood on his face, and a large pool had soaked its way into the Aubusson carpet.

At some little distance lay an Indian tomahawk, which evidently had decorated the wall among a collection of similarly ancient weapons. On a lounge stood a heavy sole-leather suit case, open, and with some of its contents lying beside it.

All this I noted. Considering the circumstances and my temperament, I think I acted, on the whole, rather commendably. There was small use in arousing the house. My first thought was for Verdyne, and I possessed sufficient medical knowledge to convince me that he wasn't dead. His pulse was fluttering feebly.

Happily, the desk supported a jug of iced water and a decanter of whisky; I forced a stiff dose of the latter between my friend's teeth. I next turned to his injury. This had been occasioned by a heavy blow from a blunt instrument, evidently the reverse end of the tomahawk, which had broken the skin and caused a depression in the skull which I prayed God was not a fracture.

Searching for an article with which to cleanse the wound, I saw a handkerchief lying on the lounge beside the suitcase. This, however, proving unsatisfactory on account of its meagre size, I secured Verdyne's from his coat.

The wound stanched to the best of my poor ability, I cleared the lounge and, exerting all my strength, succeeded in placing Verdyne upon it. All this had occupied but a few minutes. Now, going to the telephone on the desk, I called central and requested her to connect me with police headquarters. This accomplished, I related briefly what had transpired, requesting that a doctor and a policeman be sent up at once.

It now occurred to me that in the meantime Lefèvre might be of some assistance; and, knowing his room to be on the same floor as my own, I hastened upstairs, being careful to make no noise; for I had no desire to alarm Mrs. Verdyne suddenly or unnecessarily.

My precautionary measures, however, proved unnecessary; for she met me in the corridor. A white peignoir enveloped her, and her hair fell in a long, thick braid far below her waist.

"What is the matter?" she asked clearly. "Is anything wrong?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Verdyne. Your husband is not very well——"

"Where is he? Tell me, please, at once, and without equivocation."

I met her steady eyes for a moment, then answered: "In the library. I will be there immediately with Doctor Lefèvre."

She turned, without a word, and ran downstairs.

Lefèvre would not answer to my knock, so without ceremony I pushed the door open and marched in. He was snoring vigorously, but, to my surprise, lay fully dressed save for his coat.

In the corridor we were greeted by Lockhaven with: "What's the row, old man?"

I explained as briefly as possible, adding that it would be wisest to keep the rest of the guests in ignorance of the night's happenings.

"Good Lord—this is awful!" he exclaimed. "Wait till I throw on some clothes."

Returning to the library, we found Mrs. Verdyne kneeling by the lounge, while Chew held a basin of water and a sponge. She was by far the more composed of the two, and proceeded with her work with the deftness and celerity usually encountered only in those technically trained. On the other hand, the butler presented a spectacle which at any other time would have been laughable. He was garbed only in nightshirt and trousers, the latter of which, owing to some unfortuitous circumstance, had been put on back

side foremost. This, together with his generous proportions, imparted to his figure a distinction that was almost fascinating.

"This is orful, sir!" he said to me in an aside. "It ain't good form at all, and I never knew such a breach of etiquette to 'appen since I took service. If you'll be so good as to 'old the basin, sir, I'll make so bold as to put on some clothes. It ain't right that the dignity of the 'ouse should suffer."

At this suggestion I became conscious of my dressing gown and disheveled appearance. So I told Lockhaven that I would dress, and requested him to see that nothing was disturbed until the arrival of the law.

"I took the liberty of phoning headquarters and a doctor," I added, to Mrs. Verdyne.

She made no reply.

When I returned to the library, the chief of police himself, a constable and the village practitioner were on the scene. The first named—Crewe was his name—immediately took me aside and questioned me closely as to the night's events, entering my answers in a notebook, while the constable assumed a trenchant attitude by the window. From the questions directed at me, I was inclined to suspect that my interrogator was one of those morbidly skeptical beings to whom everything must be proven. I began to dislike him heartily, and at length succeeded in losing my temper—no very difficult feat at any time. This did not serve to heighten our mutual regard.

"Very well, sir," he said, at length shutting his notebook. "That will be all for the present. I'll resume the inquiry in the morning, and question the guests severally and at length. The policeman will remain in the library until that time."

Meanwhile, Verdyne had been removed to his room. He was still unconscious, and the village doctor, evidently a more efficient individual than the chief of police, announced that, while there was no fracture, the injury was of sufficient gravity as to occasion considerable misgiving. At his suggestion a wire was sent to the Verdynes' family physician—Doctor Blow.

Dawn was now breaking, and we could not think of retiring. In the absence of his mistress, Chew undertook to serve a buffet breakfast in the dining room, to which the other guests, now cognizant of the tragedy, dribbled down singly and in couples, in various states of disarray.

No one as yet had gained that state of mental aloofness which would prompt a conjecture as to the motive for, and the perpetrator of, the deed. The consensus of opinion was that the law would attend satisfactorily to its duty; and that, as soon as our host regained consciousness, the mystery would be speedily solved.

Although I said nothing, I did not share in this generally optimistic belief. I felt that a problem had been stated which would necessitate more than the average acumen to solve. And I felt quite satisfied that Police Captain Crewe did not possess that necessary acumen.

CHAPTER VI.

In order briefly and at the same time fully to relate the events of the ensuing week, necessarily more or less of a police court nature, I must have recourse to my diary, whose entries covering this period are very complete. I will begin with the morning following the assault.

Sunday, June 7, 1907—Arrival of Doctor Blow and trained nurse.

Mrs. Verdyne promptly sent away the latter. She said no one should nurse her husband but herself. Verdyne's condition pronounced critical. Heard Doctor Blow ask Mrs. Verdyne if her husband was addicted to drugs. Think this strange.

Entire household examined severally and at length by Police Captain Crewe. Understand a muddy footprint has been found on the veranda outside the window. House besieged by newspaper men and kindred birds of prey. Police Captain Crewe has given instructions

that no guest be permitted to leave without his sanction. Blum very angry. Says he must and will attend to "beesness" to-morrow. Lockhaven and I have insisted upon staying until the affair is cleared up. No motive apparent. Doctor Lefèvre is proving himself obnoxious to me. Suppose he has not forgotten the Corot incident, though it should be no time for differences.

Monday, June 8, 1907—Verdyne has had a turn for the worse. Regained consciousness for a period. Doctor Blow would not permit any questions to be put to him, and the patient made no reference to his injury. There is a possibility of brain fever developing.

Blum, after a heated argument with Captain Crewe, left for New York this morning on the eight-fifteen.

Lockhaven is taking his friend's injury very much to heart. Had no idea his affection for Verdyne was so deep. He evidently has had some disagreement with young Rider, for the boy acts coldly toward him. This, together with my difference with Lefèvre, does not make the atmosphere very pleasant. I suppose we are all too highly strung.

Mrs. Verdyne has not been downstairs since.

Mrs. Chenevix is turning out better than I had expected. There is something in her, after all—I think. She has taken complete charge of domestic affairs. Am beginning to like her.

The press has taken the usual nine days' interest in the case. The general belief is that the assault was committed by Sound pirates, who have been active in the neighborhood, and who were frightened off before they could accomplish their purpose. This theory harmonizes with my statement regarding the strange vessel I saw. I think Captain Crewe is inclined to give it credence. Lockhaven ridicules it.

Captain Mock, of the *Viper,* called this morning. Questioned by Crewe, he said he had no knowledge of such a vessel as I described.

Lefèvre is still on the outs with me.

Tuesday, June 9, 1907—Verdyne has developed brain fever. I fear Mrs. Verdyne is wearing herself out with nursing, but she will permit no professional to assume her place.

This has been a day of quarrels. No doubt we are overstrung and unnerved, existing upon one another. Lockhaven has had a difference with Mr. Rabe, the secretary—what about, I cannot imagine. They almost came to blows. And Mrs. Chenevix evidently has had some misunderstanding with her hostess. The latter still remains with her husband, and I understand she told Chew to take orders regarding household matters from no one but herself. This is evidently aimed at Mrs. Chenevix, and shows a smallness in Mrs. Verdyne's character which I did not suspect. However, no doubt she is not herself.

I am sure Mrs. Chenevix has endeavored to be of service. She has said she will leave in the morning.

Police Captain Crewe's embargo appears to have been raised; for Mrs. Arbuthnot, the Misses Tweedie and Miss Brown leave in the morning. Young Rider, Melrose, Lefèvre, Lockhaven and myself intend remaining, in case we may be of any assistance.

Wednesday, June 10, 1907—Entirely new development. Mrs. Verdyne has discovered that the Meteor diamond has been stolen! It was kept in a safe in her dressing room. She saw it last on Saturday morning. I think this has a distinct bearing on the fact of Verdyne's being dressed in a sack suit and having a portmanteau packed.

Captain Mock, of the *Viper,* has testified that his employer was expected aboard at five a. m., business necessitating his presence in New York early on Sunday morning.

I have told Captain Crewe of Verdyne's intention of placing the diamond in a safe deposit vault. It is conjectured that he had packed it in his suit case, and that some members of the criminal profession were aware of his intention. This necessarily suggests an accomplice in the house.

I understand that Mrs. Verdyne has asked Mrs. Chenevix to remain. Their difference must have been mended; for

the latter has consented. I am glad, since she is just the person for such an emergency.

I saw Mrs. Verdyne for a moment to-day—the first time since that terrible night. She looks a wreck. Knowing I have no business affairs to demand my presence, she has asked me to remain; but she won't permit Lockhaven to neglect his interests any longer. She is firm on this point, and he is leaving to-night.

As far as I know, no effort has been made by Captain Crewe to trace the strange vessel which I noted. In fact, I consider his actions most dilatory and uncomprehensible.

Verdyne is about the same, and no one is permitted near him.

Thursday, June 11, 1907—Doctor Lefèvre, young Rider and myself are the only remaining guests, Lockhaven and Mr. Melrose having left last night.

I have had a chat with Doctor Blow, and he affirms that Verdyne took a large dose of morphine on the night of the assault and robbery. A box of powders has been found in the library. I never suspected that Verdyne was addicted to the drug.

I do not see any light ahead. Captain Crewe calls it an inside job, and is putting the domestics through a severe gruelling. I think his manner and methods antagonize people—I know they have done so in my case.

I have been thinking much of the Indian legend and the past history of the Meteor diamond, which I have ventured to christen the "New Moonstone." As far as I know, Verdyne and myself are the only people who know anything regarding it; and he is unable to discuss the subject. Were Police Captain Crewe a different type of individual, I would confide in him; but he is a strict materialist, and, I am sure, would have nothing to do with legends or unsubstantiated assertions. I think I will speak to Mrs. Verdyne about it.

Friday, June 12, 1907—I have had a long conversation with Mrs. Verdyne regarding the last-named subject. Her appearance worries me. She says she knows nothing regarding the history of the "New Moonstone."

Strange to say, it was kept imbedded in a huge potato which reposed in a zinc-lined box specially constructed, and her husband had given strict instructions that it should never be removed. She used to look at it frequently, but never removed it from its strange bed. I don't profess to understand all this.

Her husband and herself were the only ones, so far as she knows, who were cognizant of the combination of the safe. This combination was changed every week. Verdyne had mentioned to her his intention of taking the stone to New York. She affirms that she was aware of his contemplated early Sunday morning departure. If so, why should Verdyne begin a letter to her—and why should Captain Mock be the first to speak concerning it? I feel there is very much more in the whole deplorable business than appears upon the surface.

Verdyne's condition is slightly improved, but it will be many a day before he can rationally discuss any subject. In fact, Doctor Blow has ventured the opinion that, when such a consummation is effected, his patient's mind may be a blank concerning the incidents of that memorable night. I understand this phenomenon is not an uncommon occurrence in those suffering from brain fever superinduced by violence. However, we must hope for the best.

It is probable, however, that, so far as Verdyne is concerned, motive and perpetrator may forever remain a mystery. Taking this into consideration, together with the fact that the Indian legend has been ever present in my mind, I have spoken to Mrs. Verdyne regarding it, and have requested permission to search her husband's private papers for any evidence which may tend to throw some light on the subject. She has asked time to consider the proposition.

Later—Following a consultation with Mr. Rabe—Chew informed me that she was giving the secretary an audience

in her dressing room—Mrs. Verdyne has given me a flat refusal. I feel that the Indian has influenced her. My *amour propre* is not easily offended, but I do think John Verdyne's oldest friend should be at least trusted equally with a scurvy Indian secretary. My dislike for the latter has been vindicated. He is a snake. I think some of his actions need an explanation, and, were Captain Crewe less pig-headed, he might find a valuable ally in myself.

Later—I have violated all my private feelings and spoken to Crewe regarding the Indian legend and the history of the "New Moonstone!" He is a greater ass than even I thought him. Utterly pooh-poohed the whole matter, and said he never wasted his intelligence on old wives' tales. I suggested that he had none to waste.

I have had occasion to go to New York, and during the journey there and back had the uncomfortable sensation of being watched by a Jewish-looking man with heavy whiskers. I can offer no concrete proof of this, but the belief somehow remains. I also suspect that my room was searched during my absence. This naturally angers me. If I cannot be treated as a guest should be I will leave. I am going to speak to Mrs. Verdyne about it.

Sunday, June 14, 1907—Nothing of any moment happened yesterday; so, as I always do on such occasions, I left Saturday's page a blank. To-day, however, has been different.

I have gone through a terrible ordeal to-day, one I never thought to experience. It is awful to set down the words in uncompromising black and white, but I must be true to the truth. I must be calm, and write coherently.

I have been charged by that vile animal—he deserves no better appellation—Police Captain Crewe, with knowing more about Verdyne's injury and the robbery of the "New Moonstone" than I have related to him. He requested an interview in the library—but I will set down the episode just as it happened.

I took my time about heeding his request; for I have been at some pains to let him understand that I am not to be ordered about like a domestic. Something surely is due a gentleman, even from the law.

It was late when I entered the library, and the room was arranged precisely the same as when I discovered my poor friend lying sorely wounded and unconscious. Everything was the same, down to the smallest detail, with the exception, of course, of Verdyne himself. I understand this is a proceeding termed the "third degree" by which the police seek to extort a confession. I was alone, as I thought, and naturally the too familiar scene occasioned me considerable distress—even horror.

Again I thought I saw Verdyne's feet sticking from under the desk; again I saw the ugly splash of blood soaking its way into the carpet. Again, actually confronting me, was the uncompleted letter on the desk, and the suit case on the lounge. Even the blood-stained tomahawk lay as I had last seen it. The French window was open, the night air feeling, and in fact, *smelling* the same. It was the first time I had entered the room since that terrible night, and I felt unnerved, unstrung; for the past week had been a trying one. I dropped into the desk chair and covered my face with my hands.

When at length I recovered some of my wonted composure and looked up, Police Captain Crewe was regarding me grimly. He had been on the veranda and, from the moment I entered, had watched me through the French window. He had the effrontery to tell me this himself. But I will set down our interview in detail.

"Mr. Bone," said he, taking a seat in such a way that the light fell full upon my face while his own remained in shadow, "you have kindly given me two detailed accounts regarding how you came to discover Mr. Verdyne lying here—there is the very spot at your feet. You can still see the blood. Now, may I ask you to relate it a third time?"

"Is such a repetition necessary to one of your undoubted intelligence?" I asked, my anger rising.

"Now, see here, sir," said he, suddenly looking as brutal as were his manners, "I've stood enough of your guff, Mr. Bone. You're going to go over your actions of Saturday night and——"

"I'm going to do nothing of the kind," I said, arising. "But I'm going to tell you my candid opinion of you. You're a blundering inefficient, sir—a blundering inefficient, sir, and an ass into the bargain. That's what *you* are."

He turned in the middle of my speech, and locked the door. "Now," said he, "you may be as high and mighty as you like, Mr. Bone; but I represent the law down here—understand?"

"And very badly, too," said I, thoroughly angry. "You cannot intimidate me, sir. You cannot do it. I will not allow it!"

"You've nothing more to tell me about Saturday night?" he asked calmly.

"I have not. I have told you everything."

"You're quite sure?"

"I refuse to reiterate my statement, sir. It is wasted time giving you the word of a gentleman; for you have never been accustomed to deal with one."

"Well," he said, stroking his chin, "have you ever seen *that* before?" He held out a handkerchief stained a dull rusty brown.

"I have," said I. "You got that in the pocket of my dressing gown. I found it among Mr. Verdyne's effects, and started to use it, but found it too small!"

"It has a 'B' in the corner," said he.

"It's a ladies' size," said I.

"Naturally," said he dryly. "And I suppose, Mr. Bone, you also found *this* among Mr. Verdyne's effects." He held out a slip of paper.

"What is it?" I asked.

"You should know," said he. "I found it in the pocket of one of your coats. It's a receipt from the local express office made out in the name of Célestine Flaveur—Mrs. Verdyne's maid—for a package sent to a New York firm whose business is disposing of jewelry!"

It could only be the paper the maid had dropped on the night of my arrival, and which I had picked up. I had forgotten it completely until this moment. I had never looked at it. I hastily reviewed the situation. If I told this horribly suspicious person how I came by the slip, his vile mind might drag Mrs. Verdyne herself into the mess. That must be averted, at all hazards. Yet he knew it belonged to the maid—I did not know what reply to make.

"Come," said he, "own up, Mr. Bone."

"I don't know in the least what point you're trying to make," said I. "I found the slip—that's all!"

He regarded me steadily for quite a time.

"All right," he said, arising. "We'll let it go at that, Mr. Bone—for the present. We run up against many strange cases, and nothing surprises us. I don't think Mrs. Verdyne is very keen on this case, and until Mr. Verdyne recovers and I have a word with him, I step out. Before I do so, however, I wish you to understand that I have as much intelligence as yourself—perhaps a little more."

I could only regard him mutely, as I might some irresponsible lunatic.

CHAPTER VII.

As soon as Police Captain Crewe had left the house, I sent Chew to request an interview with his mistress. After some delay she received me in her dressing room.

"Mrs. Verdyne," I said, "I have just concluded a highly unpleasant interview with Captain Crewe——"

"I think I understand what you are about to say," she interrupted quickly. "From his attitude, I was led to believe that he entertained some doubts of your veracity, Mr. Bone, and so I requested him to drop the case at once. I am so sorry you have been so insulted in my house; but I did not become immediate-

ly aware of Captain Crewe's absurd suspicions."

"The man's an ass," I said, "and has only muddled the matter. I can see that it is not only myself against whom his evil mind is working, but others who——"

"Others—which others, Mr. Bone?"

"I cannot tell you, Mrs. Verdyne. He said nothing openly, of course; but I have a vague idea of what he suspects. I won't insult you by communicating it to you. But I have come to request your sanction for my enlisting the services of some one competent enough to sift this matter to the bottom. Captain Crewe has withdrawn from the case. The services of an unprejudiced and competent detective, I think, are due each and every inmate of this house, quite aside from the necessity of recovering your diamond and bringing to justice the assailant, or assailants, of your husband."

She flushed nervously, and began toying with her rings. "I am so sick of all this espionage," she said restlessly. "Must we have more of it? Cannot we wait until my husband has recovered?"

"I am afraid not, Mrs. Verdyne. You know it will be some time before your husband is better, and even then, so Doctor Blow intimates, his mind may be a blank regarding the events of Sunday morning. What will be gained by waiting? We may be wasting valuable time, and innocent people may suffer in consequence."

"What do you care what a person like Captain Crewe thinks of you, Mr. Bone?"

"I'm vain enough to wish justice from every one, Mrs. Verdyne. But I wasn't thinking of myself."

"You are referring to those others," she said quickly. "Can you not tell me who they are, Mr. Bone?"

"I cannot, Mrs. Verdyne."

She hesitated; her young brows gathered in a straight line.

"Was anything said against my husband?" she asked at length.

"Certainly not. What could be said?"

"I don't know, Mr. Bone. People say what they like."

"Mrs. Verdyne," I began, "I feel you have on your mind something other than this matter, other than your husband's illness. Won't you acquit me of all intention of being merely inquisitive if I ask you to share your troubles with me? Remember, I am your husband's oldest friend, and——"

"No—no!" she said hastily, arising and with a restless movement pushing the heavy hair back from her forehead. "I have nothing on my mind other than what you know—really, I haven't. Thank you so much for your offer, however; I'll be glad to take advantage of it whenever I can. Regarding calling in a detective, I think it best that, for the present, at least, nothing should be done."

"But, Mrs. Verdyne——" I began.

"Please consider my decision as final," she said. "I am not going to have the house overrun with blundering spies. I have had more than enough of them. My first and only interest is the care of my husband. I am thankful he was not taken from me, and justice can wait upon those who are responsible for his injury. As for the 'New Moonstone,' as you call it, I have no time or inclination to think about it. If it's gone, it's gone, and that's the end of it."

"Do you consider this a wise decision, Mrs. Verdyne?"

"Wise or not, Mr. Bone, it is my wish."

"I think," said I, "that, were your husband able to express an opinion, it would coincide with my own. In fact, I am sure it would. Leaving all other questions aside, I know he set great store by the 'New Moonstone,' whose history I have related to you; and I know he would desire that immediate steps be taken toward its recovery while the case, as it were, is still new."

"Perhaps," she replied. "But, until my husband is able to express such a desire, I must adhere to my decision."

"Very well, Mrs. Verdyne." It was with difficulty that I restrained my annoyance. Here was a chit of a girl,

through ignorance and prejudice, defying all the dictates of common sense and prudence; setting at nought, I felt certain, the unexpressed desire of her husband. She did not realize the gravity of the case; for I could not bring myself to relate the contemptible Crewe theory which, I felt sure, implicated not only me but Mrs. Verdyne herself. I had gathered this more from Captain Crewe's manner than from anything he had said.

By the time Verdyne was able to express an opinion, all chance of finding the real culprits would have been forfeited. Much as I respected Mrs. Verdyne, she was but a girl; and I considered myself best qualified, in the absence of John Verdyne, to serve his interests. In short, I weighed matters carefully and came to the conclusion that a detective was essential, and that, if he could not enter the case with Mrs. Verdyne's sanction, he must enter without it. But enter it he should. I would put a spoke in Captain Crewe's wheel, and one which he could not move.

Obviously a private agency was best suited to the circumstances, and so on the following day I paid a visit to New York and the Pinkerton office, where I laid the matter fully and clearly before the superintendent, requesting the services of their best man, expense not to be considered. He was to be sent down to The Drift on the following morning.

That same night I necessarily told to my hostess an egregious lie. Naturally, I desired to remain until Verdyne was better; and, in the meantime, being engaged on an anthology of the American poets, I had ventured to engage the services of a secretary. Would this be presuming too much on her hospitality?

Indeed it would not, and she was greatly indebted to me for so kindly subordinating my interests to hers. Her husband would be so glad when he learned that I was remaining. Would I make use of the library, if associations did not render it unhabitable, and consider it as my own? And she would see that I was not unnecessarily disturbed, and that my secretary had every attention.

In fact, Mrs. Verdyne was so exceedingly nice about my presumptuous request that I felt inexpressibly contemptible and unworthy. But I comforted myself with the belief that, when the time came, she would see matters in the true light, and that I was acting as would her husband.

The following morning, as I sat expectantly in the library, Chew brought in a card which bore the name:

Mr. James Blunt.

"Ha!" thought I, with satisfaction. "If names have any significance, here is the man we need."

But in this instance the adjective "blunt" was seemingly a sarcasm; for following the dignified butler came the owner of the card—a dapper youth, small and neat, with very pretty and innocent eyes protected by pince-nez, and carrying a cane, the handle of which he had the inane habit of sucking. I scrutinized the card and then this fashion plate in light gray.

"Are you from Pinkerton's?" I asked at length incredulously.

"Yeth, if you pleathe," he lisped mildly.

"There must be some mistake," said I. "Good heavens! I wanted a *man* —their best man! I mean no offense, but—you understand?"

Mr. Blunt peeled off his chamois gloves, folded them neatly, and placed them in his pocket.

"Yeth, I underthtand," he said, quite pleasantly. "My thingth are outthide. Will you pleathe tell the butler chap where they go?"

"I think," said I, in my best manner, "that you do not as yet comprehend my attitude. I repeat, there must be some mistake. I must decline your services. This is no case for an amateur, a tyro. I regret that your superior is seemingly so ignorant of the exigencies of the occasion, and I regret the inconvenience which you have therefore occasioned. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Blunt."

"Good morning," said he, slowly turning from a picture he had been contemplating, and removing the cane from

his mouth. "And now, will you pleathe tell the butler chap where my thingth are to go?"

"But, my dear sir——"

I was arrested by a sudden and altogether unexpected gleam of intelligence in his mild eyes.

"Come, Mr. Bone," said he, "I've got my detail, and I can only be chased off by headquarters. Let us get at this American anthology of yours. I know something about the particular poets involved. I'm sorry I look such an ass, but—really, I'm the Pinkertons' best man."

I noticed that under the stimulation of interest his lisp had disappeared. There was, moreover, something so altogether pleasing and promising in his manner that I felt constrained to give him a trial. He might be, and no doubt was, the mental inferior of Police Captain Crewe; but, on the other hand, he owned none of the latter's pig-headed obstinacy or egotism.

Here was a man who estimated at a glance the standing and character of another, and who showed a fitting deference and respect for one who filled the rôle of gentleman. Here was a man who, despite his calling, was not ignorant of, or unversed in the ways of, polite society.

In short, Mr. Blunt, under my guidance, would make a very efficient weapon. He was one with whom I could associate intimately without feeling contaminated; one who would consent to be directed by me; one, in short, open to reason, who could appreciate the respect due to a man of my standing. I am a keen judge of character—if a natural modesty has prohibited my stating so before—and I thus estimated Mr. Blunt. With him to obey, I would shatter the Crewe theory, and solve the problem of the "New Moonstone."

Here, true to my intention, I find I must quit the rôle of narrator with the entrance upon the stage of Mr. James Blunt. Although I assumed the stellar rôle with reluctance and with considerable misgiving, I found that, once my début was successfully accomplished, the succeeding drama—to continue with the histrionic simile—so enlisted my interest and liking that it is with reluctance that I now resign the limelight in favor of another.

Reviewing these pages, I cannot help experiencing some small feeling of self-approbation; for I consider that, on the whole, I have accomplished my task rather commendably. True, there are certain threads, as it were, which necessitate being joined together; which necessitate being woven into the warp and woof of the story, in order to make the pattern consistent.

These threads are certain relatively unimportant details or incidents which occurred at The Drift during the week succeeding the assault and robbery, and which necessarily find no place in my diary. I deemed them of no interest to the reader, nor considered them as bearing any import on the narrative; for they were chiefly conversations with Mrs. Chenevix and those male guests who had remained—in short, the uninteresting exchange of ideas, daily routine, et cetera, which occur in the life of any household.

I shall now place this manuscript in the hands of Mr. James Blunt, or "Lisping Jimmie," as he is better known among those of his calling, in order that he may refresh his memory before assuming the many responsibilities which wait upon the rôle of narrator.

I can wish him no better luck—and I say this without egotism—than that he may accomplish his task as creditably as have I.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Mrs. Sweeny's Suitor

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Mrs. Sweeney's Boss," Etc.

Belle Sweeny, the race-track gambler's widow, is the most humorous character originated in fiction during the last ten years. Her sprightly conversations with the Boarder, interlarded with poignant anecdotes from her past and a running commentary upon the things of the present, rival the monologues of Mr. Dooley at his best.

MRS. SWEENY gave the Boarder two letters and a newspaper, the morning contribution of the postman. "It's fierce to be poor," she declared.

"Poverty has its disadvantages," the Boarder corrected subtly.

"A lady without no money in New York has more trouble than a automobeel cop on a bright Sunday afternoon," supplemented Mrs. Sweeny grimly.

"Hm-h!" coughed the Boarder, inserting his letter opener beneath the flap of an envelope.

"Once I had so much money that I was carriage trade," came next from Mrs. Sweeny's lips.

Her persistent harping on financial conditions struck the Boarder as unusual. He glanced up into her face. There he noted a determined expression, as of venturesome things contemplated. And, as though in answer to the question in his eyes, she solemnly announced:

"Mister, I got a invite to go out in a automobeel!"

"That's fine," commented the Boarder.

"It's with Tim Lacy, the fellow that owns Prince Larry and June Bug and all them other famous horses," she went on. "Tim was a fr'en' of my Danny b'fore he died. Honust, mister, them two was thicker than a Chink laundryman and a Sunday-school teacher. Once Tim and Danny was in partnership at the race track, Tim puttin' up the money and Danny bettin' it. They made sixteen thousand dollars in two weeks, and I had the awfullest time gettin' Danny sober again."

"You certainly led an exciting life as a gambler's wife—and I'll hazard a guess that you wished he did something else," said the Boarder. There was a sad note in his voice which neither escaped Mrs. Sweeny nor was appreciated by her.

"My Danny had his faults," she snapped, "but they wasn't faulty faults! They was just sort of hives on his disposition. Honust, mister, he was the loveliest husban' in the whole world; and when people slurs him it makes me so mad I could throw ink at my best white shirt-waist. Danny wasn't the kind of a man to go crazy over religion, but he was good to me. W'y, he usta smoke twenty-five cent cigars in the house, so I wouldn't have to breathe no cheap nicotine. And it ain't all men that's so considerate of their wives. Of course he's dead now, and I s'pose I

got to put up with that pipe of yours, as long as the board of health won't set a kibosh on it——"

"Why, Mrs. Sweeny," cried the Boarder, in surprise, "I never knew that you objected to my pipe! I'm sorry."

"Oh, now, you just go on smokin' your pipe," advised Mrs. Sweeny hastily. "I didn't mean nothin'. I was just sort of put out b'cause you hinted that my Danny wasn't a good person for me to ussociate with. I'm used to that pipe now, and if you stopped smokin' it I'd feel lost, like I would if the people overhead quit practicin' on the piano."

But, notwithstanding this assurance, the Boarder refused to dismiss his sulky demeanor until Mrs. Sweeny was well along in her narrative again. Then bygones tacitly became bygones, and the maligned pipe faded into the yesterday of things, only to be unconsciously resurrected and filled before the very eyes of its accuser.

"Dan liked Tim Lacy," Mrs. Sweeny continued reminiscently. "Them two was like two brothers, only they never got into no fights. And when Dan was all shot full of holes that time, and he was countin' up how many carriages we'd have to hire for the funeral, it was Tim that got out his pencil and paper and done all the 'rithmetic for me. He was a true fr'en' to me and Danny, Tim was; and you can see what I thought of him when I let him hang around the house durin' them awful times. It was him that kept me from jumpin' out of the window and doin' all them other crazy things I was goin' to do, the day they brought Danny home. And now he's goin' to take me out ridin' in his automobeel, and"—lowering her eyes—"maybe I ain't goin' to be poor like this no more."

She did not meet the quick, inquiring glance of the Boarder; but turned to the window and regarded the traffic, while her fingers picked nervously at the folds of her gown. Presently she faced him, and asked:

"Nobody ever was good all the time, was they?"

"I never knew any one who was, Mrs. Sweeny," said the Boarder.

"Oh, well, it don't matter much, I guess," she half sighed. Then, with an effort, she began to tell of a recent meeting with her husband's former friend, Mr. Tim Lacy.

"He stops me on the street—that was two weeks ago—and he spends quite a long time tellin' me how I oughtn't to be poor like I am; and I says: 'How am I goin' to help it?' And he didn't say nothin' right off, but sort of stammered and says: 'Hem—hem!' and such a line of talk. Then he got into his gait again, and begins to tell that he has got enough in the bank to keep fifty wives. And continuin', he laughs kinda foolish and says: 'Belle Sweeny, you look like the little lady that can take the milk bottles off my dumbwaiter.'

"'Gwan, Timmy!' I tells him, 'and put another film in your movin'-picture machine. The heat's pretty fierce today,' I says, 'and I won't hold you to them statements.'

"But he kept on insistin' and insistin', and me turnin' him down and turnin' him down. He was up here the other afternoon, and got me to promise to go out in his automobeel with him."

"Then you seriously consider him?" suggested the Boarder.

"Him—ugh!" She shuddered. Then, more deliberately, she explained:

"He's got a lot of money; but he's a shifty-eyed, weazened-up little shrimp that got rich runnin' a gamblin' house where poor clerks and them kind of people set in and gave up their wages every Saturday night. Nobody respects him, like they do the real gent'manly gamblers that only takes over the bank rolls of the idle rich. And they do say that he puts up money to get a lot of low-down people out of jail with, and charges 'em a big fee for it."

"You mean that he is a professional bondsman," supplemented the Boarder.

"That's it," cried Mrs. Sweeny, "that's it. I couldn't think of the name, but I know it was somethin' that the

papers is alwus sayin' is a shame. And that ain't all about him, neither. He's just a miserable, low-down man that no woman can know without shiverin' for six weeks after talkin' with him. He was a fr'en' of my Danny and he was alwus kind to me; but I never could stand havin' him near me. He gave me the creeps, he did. Mister, if there's a man on earth that I loathe, it's Tim."

"Then why do you have him around?" the Boarder asked.

"Well, this is why," she answered. "Here I am, keepin' a flat in Central Park West, because me and Danny usta live in this street and so I can't bear to move away. W'y, I can look out of the window and see the very p'leeceman he usta punch in the ribs and give cigars to. And there's the sidewalk he usta walk on, and step over the cracks, so's he'd have good luck. I can't give up this place, mister; I'd die if I had to move. But it's harder than beatin' the races to get the rent money together, and keep up any kind of a front. I go round like a ragpicker's dream most of the time. I haven't got no good clothes nor nothin', like I usta have when Danny was livin'. And if I married Tim Lacy I'd be carriage trade again."

There was in Mrs. Sweeny's eyes an expression which the Boarder did not like. He saw that she was swaying between the influence of her better nature and the lure of wealth.

"Think," he cautioned her, "before you do anything. I'd be true to myself, Mrs. Sweeny, if I were you."

"Do you expect a person in my state of mind to do any real-lace thinkin'?" she queried sharply. "My head ain't built for workin' out problems like that. Most all I can get through it these days is the plain housekeepin' problems, such as: 'What are you goin' to do when the rent comes round?' There's only one answer, and it don't take a college education to get to it. And another little example is this one: 'When you just have got to have a new hat, and there ain't no money to get it with, do you get it, or don't you get it?' That's what I've been sayin' to myself for the last two weeks and longer. Do I get that hat, or do I leave it down there in Miss Toohey's millinery emporium? I need it—oh, my gee, how I need it! But do I get it? The answer is about the easiest thing I ever tried to figure out—I don't."

"Perhaps," said the Boarder soothingly, "something will turn up."

"If you ain't the limit!" sneered Mrs. Sweeny. "You know very well that you don't sit around and hope for somethin' to turn up, and here you are tellin' me that there's a chance! Things don't turn up. They're nailed down, and you have got to push somethin' under 'em and pry real hard when you make 'em turn up. Maybe I'll get that hat and be swellin' round here in a bunch of cheer-up clothes, pretty soon, that will make the other women I know look like a dozen cast-off door mats."

"Exactly," assented the Boarder. "You never can tell."

"But I can," she said positively.

"I'm interested," he insinuated.

"Didn't I tell you I was goin' out in a automobeel?" she reminded him. "And don't folks that rides around in them things usually have pretty good clothes? And they don't look as if they was ashamed to look their butcher in the face, owin' to their habit of buyin' dog meat instead of the good cuts —now, do they? Right now it's up to me whether it'll be tenderloin and Tim, or dog meat and me. And it seems like Dog Meat's a mud horse, and the track's dry and fast."

The Boarder decided that he was quite incapable of directing this amazing woman along the right course. "I don't exactly admire your frame of mind," he said hopelessly.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" she flashed. "I ain't alone in this marryin' a check book. There's Mrs. Powers, now. Everybody knows she married old man McGorray for his money; and, honust, mister, he's the limit. W'y, one night, when they was havin' dinner in a swell hotel, Mac was whistlin' so loud at his soup, to cool it, that some one sends along a waiter with the request

for him to whistle 'Cavilleria Rusticana' next. He's awful, he is. But Mrs. McGorray has got her own automobeel, with a fellow all lit up in a flunkey uniform to make it go; and she dresses just splendid. You'd think, to look at her, that a paint shop blew up, and she was all the pretty colors mashed into one. All the women that knows her is so envious that they go round the corner and stick pins in theirselfs whenever they see her. And all she has got to put up with, to get all them things, is Mac. I ain't sayin' that she don't earn all she gets. Stayin' around where Mac is is worth ten thousand dollars a minute—and a lot of di'mon's thrown in."

"But could you stand a life like that?" asked the Boarder, in a most discouraging tone.

"Tim ain't as bad as Mac is," she declared, rallying to the defence of her suitor. Then, in the next breath, she exclaimed: "Oh, my goodness, yes, he is—he's worse! But—but he's awful well off, mister."

There was a wistful ring in her voice. It was the pleading hesitancy of one who would justify a contemplated wrong.

The Boarder noticed it, and his thoughts reverted to the race-track days of this woman. In the vicious, worldly influences there, he sought an explanation of her hard, cynical views—her willingness to sacrifice herself for gain. His mental process was mirrored in his observation, the language of which he purposely put over her head to soften its sting:

"Your habit of thought was developed under degenerate auspices."

"Huh!" said Mrs. Sweeny disdainfully. "You can't scare me with any bundle of conversation like that. I never did anything that sounded like it; so I can plead not guilty." When in doubt, she resorted to satire, in her word tilts with the Boarder, and, as she informed her friends, many times he should have felt stingingly rebuked, if he felt at all.

Having thus let him realize the overwhelming force of a superior intellect, she vouchsafed him a moment for reflection, before returning to the matter at hand.

"This here wooin' of Tim's has been goin' on a long time, though I never suspected it before. He's as shy and crafty as a burglar, Tim is. And, after all, he's a real good-hearted man. If I could get over despisin' him, mister, I think I might learn to stay in the same room with him, and not feel like yellin'. Now, after Danny was killed, he drops round to cheer me up.

" 'Belle,' he says, 'if rent day ever gets to happenin' a little bit too often for you to get away with it, let me know. There's a bank downtown where I shove a piece of paper through a hole, and a fellow gives me real money for it.'

"Now, mister, that was nice of him, wasn't it? But I just took one look at him, and them old shivers come over me. He seemed like somethin' inhuman with his little shiftin' eyes, and the yellow teeth, and his collar—ugh! I couldn't stand for him, then—no, sir!

"So I says: 'Mr. Lacy, as a widow lady in a most terrible hole,' I says, 'and dead sure to go in deeper, I thank you for your offer of a boost. I can't take nothin' now,' I says, 'nor next week, nor the week after; but if the double cross comes my way, there's no tellin' what I'll do. When a lady is real poor, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'she'll even live with her husban's relatives. But as for the present, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'I'll run my own book.'

"But in them days, mister, I hadn't been up against New York alone, or perhaps I wouldn't of had the nerve to tackle it. If I'd known then what I know now, it's a dead sure thing that I'd of thought twice b'fore turnin' Tim down so cold and haughty. I didn't know then that he was strong for marryin' me, or I'd of kept him around just on general principles.

"He done more wooin', too, but it was in such a way that you'd never know it. Once he meets me on the street and says:

" 'Hello, Belle Sweeny, how's things goin'?'

" 'Fine as silk,' I says, for I don't go

round advertisin' my membership in the Down-and-Out Club. He looks me over, and he sees how worn my clothes was. Nobody could help noticin' it—and it made me so ashamed, too. So he says:

" 'The silk's got a pretty loud shine on it, Belle, for so elegant a woman as you alwus was. It ain't right, neither. Listen here—to-morrow, in the second race, Prince Larry is goin' to start, and he's won already. I'm goin' to put a hundred on him for you. Can't I do that much for the wife of my old fr'en'?' he says, pleady like.

" 'Thanks, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'but I'll do my own bettin'. I got ten dollars at home that ain't workin',' I says, 'and I'll take your tip and have a little flyer for myself, just on account of old times.'

" 'Let me take it, and I'll place it at big odds for you, Belle,' he says. And I don't know what made me do it, but when I got home I sent him the money by a messenger boy, and Prince Larry won at ten to one, and next day out comes a envelope with my little ten dollars in it, and a hundred-dollar note on the side. That's what I call wooin', mister. It's a better game for the lady than havin' some red-faced loafer sittin' around in your parlor, with the 'lectric light burnin' up your income—ain't it?"

"The money part of Lacy seems all right," admitted the Boarder, "but I think you'd get more sadness than joy out of such a marriage. There's a lot of good in you, and you ought to let it win in this case."

"Yes, and get a pail of water and a rag, and wash my windows like a proper scrub-lady, for evermore!" she snapped. "No, sir—I want you to understand that I am through with bein' a good lady. I'm goin' to be like the rest of them from now on, and watch out for the main chance. W'y, I'd marry—I'd even marry you, mister, if you had more'n four hundred dollars in the bank. I would, I would, I would—so there! And just you remember this, mister—Tim Lacy is comin' for me in his big red automobeel, this afternoon, and I have got a idee that Belle Sweeny is goin' out on a hunt for a softer snap."

"Now, Mrs. Sweeny," expostulated the Boarder. But the mistress of the house had rushed from the room. The Boarder, greatly disturbed, paced up and down in his little study, endeavoring to arrive at some method of procedure which would turn the agitated woman from her contemplated course. But, before a solution of the problem had occurred to him, he heard the hall door slam, and he knew that she had gone out on her regular daily marketing expedition. Still pondering over the situation, he departed for his work downtown.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when he returned, but the flat was deserted. He tried to read, but his mind was so filled with apprehension that he found this diversion impossible. At six o'clock he had reached a state of nervous excitement which almost sent him out into the streets in search of a big red automobile.

Suddenly a key was fitted into the lock of the hall door. He heard it click, and then there was a rustle of skirts in the corridor. Then, with a flushed, happy face, Mrs. Sweeny presented herself at the doorway of his room.

"Gee!" she announced. "I had the time of my life. We went clear to Yonkers!"

"Yes?" encouraged the Boarder.

"And we run over a dog and got our number took by a cop, somewhere up in Harlem, and I've had the grandest time!" She was fairly bubbling over with the sweetness of her experience. As she went out of the room to lay aside her wraps, she laughed softly to herself.

"This flat ought to have a good sweeping out," she observed on her return. "I never noticed how dirty it was before. To-morrow I'll just tie a cloth around my head, like a good chambermaid, and make the dust fly faster'n a man catchin' a car. I guess that gettin' out like I did this afternoon makes me notice things more, now

I'm back." She cast a sly, interrogatory glance toward the Boarder, to see if he caught the deeper meaning of her words. But he continued to regard her in a questioning manner, and so she relapsed into the babbling chatter that would eventually clear her, if she were but given time.

"Tim is a great gent'man," she averred. "When he come for me this afternoon, I couldn't help feelin' like I was a porch climber, as you might say, takin' things that wasn't meant for me. I didn't have no good excuse for bein' seen in a automobeel, for I haven't got enough money to support a puncture in the hind tire. That's the way I felt, mister. But Tim—he was that fine and sussiety-like, when he come for me! He jumped out himself, and helped me in like I was a chorus girl in the front row, that carries a spear and marks time and hollers: 'The king—the king!' Gee—it was grand, mister! I haven't had that uppish feelin' since Danny usta help me in a hansom and say to the driver: 'Take us to Forty-second and Broadway, you lobster!'

"Well, Tim tucks me in, and then he says to the shuffer: 'See if you can't get arrested gettin' out of town, Carl.' And right afterward, there come a groanin' and poppin' of the machinery, and—my gee!—we lit out of there so fast that I left my breath on the front steps. The houses and lamp-posts skipped by like a string of words jumpin' out of a runaway phonograph, and every time we pretty near hit a little boy in the street, I squealed. Honust, mister, you just can't imagine how real heavenly it was!

"After we'd got out where there wasn't so much traffic, Tim begins to talk to me. 'Belle,' he says, 'this here automobeel cost eighty-five hundred with the top and gas lamps,' he says, 'and there's a room in my private garage for a nice little 'lectric that a lady can run.'

"'Ain't that nice?' says I, settin' back in the cushions.

"'Them 'lectrics is easy to run, Belle,' he says. 'You have a little lever at your left, and you work it this way for the speeds.' He grabbed my hand and kept twistin' my arm up and down, like it was part of the machine. 'Right in this position is your first speed,' he says, givin' my arm a shove, 'and here's the second speed,' he says, shovin' my arm a little farther forward, 'and here's the third speed, and——'

"'Oh,' I says, 'cut it out, Tim!'

"'But there's more speeds,' he says.

"'Not for me,' I says. 'And as for you, you're goin' fast enough now. Let go my hand, Tim, and quit them schoolboy tricks. If you want to hold a lady's hand, grab it like a man and hold on.' I jerked it away from him, and pointed out some of the swellest scenery; but he wouldn't fall for it.

"'I got things besides scenery on my mind,' he says, and he looked in my face with them eyes of his, and I felt just like squeezin' into one of them little crevices in the leather, or any place else, to get away from him. He kinda got on my nerves, mister. And pretty soon I began to remember some things that my Danny had told me a long time ago. Danny was forever settin' me right about the ways of the world.

"Once he told me: 'Nine-tenths of this here life is trouble, little girl, and if you overbet your bank roll it's all trouble.' Then he went on to tell me that it meant somethin' about there bein' some happiness around loose all the time, but if you ain't satisfied with what you've got you're pretty sure to spoil all of it.

"So, the more I looked at Tim, bein' real close to him and viewin' him from a box seat, you might say, the surer I got that Danny's little sayin' was got off for me to do some thinkin' about, just at this particular time.

"First, I looked the automobeel over, with Carl there on the front seat, and I says to myself: 'They've got to come stronger than that for Belle Sweeny.' Then I sized up the elegant hunk of glass in Tim's necktie. It looked good to me, 'specially when I thought how p'raps I could talk him into havin' it set in a ring for me. But I got to balancin' Tim against the automobeel and

that stone, and I says to myself: 'Come again, come again!' After while I had figgered up in my mind his place in the country and his home in Seventy-second Street, and all he had in the world that I knew about, and still the little voice inside me was sayin': 'Come again, come again!'"

"What happened?" demanded the Boarder. "Are you going to marry him?"

"I wish you wouldn't be so pryin'," she complained. "It ain't no good story unless I can put some trimmin's to it. It ain't a good story at all, told right out like you wanted me to tell it. W'y, it didn't amount to nothin'. When Tim said he had somethin' besides scenery on his mind, he went on and told me about how lonesome he was, and how he wanted a wife.

"'I'd treat you swell if you'd be it,' he says.

"'Not me,' I says. 'You got the wrong number, Mr. Lacy.'

"'Does that go, Belle?' he says.

"'Nothin' ever was meant stronger,' I says. 'It goes both ways and includes the lookout, as my Danny usta say.'

"'I'm sorry,' he says.

"'I ain't,' says I.

"'Hem!' says he.

"Then we come home."

PECULIAR PERFUMES OF PLACES

DID you know that every city or town has a characteristic odor of its own?

The aroma of rosemary at sea renders the coast of Portugal distinguishable to the olfactory nerves long before it is in sight. And all visitors to Lisbon know how overpowering is the odor in question—in that particular Portuguese city, at all events.

Baku, on the Caspian Sea, is another place which can be smelled ere it is seen. But the odor is not a pleasant one. It is that of crude petroleum, which is produced there in enormous quantities.

Paris is lightly pervaded with the odor of burning charcoal.

Nice has been saturating herself for many years with the perfume of countless flowers, so that she now everywhere greets the olfactory nerves of the delighted visitor with the distilled quintessence of a million blossoms.

Parma is the city of violets; you cannot get away from the scent.

Moscow has an odd perfume of its own. It suggests cranberries of peculiar pungency. And it never leaves the nose while you remain in the place.

Nimes is saturated with the aroma of thyme. Cannes diffuses the essences of all the roses—the tuberose, yellow acacia, jasmine, and neroli.

You can taste peppermint in the air in and around Pisa.

IS A PERFECT BOOK POSSIBLE?

EXPERIENCED printers will tell you that a book absolutely perfect as to spelling, grammar, setting, et cetera, has never been given to the world.

Some years ago a firm of publishers made an effort to produce such a book. So determined were they to succeed that only the most experienced compositors were employed to set the type; the proof sheets were entrusted to one of the most learned and expert editors then living, and were afterward carefully reread by fifteen selected proofreaders, each of whom was offered the sum of fifty dollars for every error discovered.

At the end of these arduous labors the book was issued to the public, and it was then discovered that there were two glaring errors in the first chapter.

Bill Bruce of Harvard

By Burt L. Standish

Author of "The Rockspur Athletic Stories," "The Frank Merriwell Stories," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

After holding the Yale team at his mercy for four innings, Harold Kemp, Harvard's star pitcher, breaks down, giving the long-coveted chance to Bill Bruce, the freshman substitute. Bruce, who is working his way through college, wins his own game, and learns that he has incurred the everlasting enmity of Kemp, whose animosity toward the freshman is increased when Agnes, sister of Stan Hastings, a member of the nine, looks favorably upon Bill. Kemp, proud, aristocratic, and rich, is galled by the sympathy which his friends express. Especially is he incensed by the attentions of Marion Mayhew, a friend of Agnes Hastings, who has set her cap for him. Marion is a presentable girl, rather good to look at; but her newly rich mother is impossible. The return game with Yale is played at New Haven, and Bruce is put in the box at the start. The night before the game Kemp shows Stan Hastings a letter which he has received from William Bannon, manager of the Balsam Beach baseball team, offering him one hundred dollars a week if he will pitch for the summer nine. Bill Bruce wins his game again, covering himself with glory. He goes to his home at Fogg's Corners, Maine, near Balsam Beach, and learns that his father, Duncan Bruce, the blacksmith, has had a stroke of paralysis, and that he must give up his college education in order to work for his family, who have been impoverished by a lawsuit with their neighbor, Simon Vane, the storekeeper. Vane's maledictions upon Duncan Bruce horrify Asher Mullen, farmer, and Mrs. Pegger, a widow with a perpetual cold in the head, who are in the store with Truxon Bigelow, a ne'er-do-we'el. Bill, taking up his father's work at the forge, is struck to the heart by the pathetic bravery of his little sister, Jennie, who is afflicted with hip disease. He receives a visit from Joe Vane, Simon's good-for-nothing son, and his pal, Tim Dugan, a tough character. Memories of his boyish affection for Joe's sister, Ethel, return to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS PITCHER.

BILL was whistling "Up the Street" and beating time with the hammer upon a piece of red-hot iron, when Joe Vane came strutting into the shop, followed by Tim Dugan. The clothes of both were dust-laden, while their faces were flushed; and there was in the look and manner of each something that led the young smith to believe that they had been drinking.

"Hello, old Plug-at-it!" cried Vane familiarly. "Hammer your head off, if you want to; but you ought to be getting tired of it by this time. I've known campaign orators, a-tryin' to ketch votes, to give a spiel about the dignity of labor; but 'most every one of 'em had a shine on the seat of his trousers, an' mighty few callouses on his hands. It's all right to do manual labor if you can't raise the price of a meal ticket no other way; but nowadays you don't find nobody except immigrants and country Jakes and chumps earnin' their livin' by the sweat of their brows. People that really amount to anything find some easier way to reap the long green."

"Sure, me boy," agreed Dugan. "A man is a dub ter woik w'en he can duck it. Gimme a light, Joe."

Vane produced a handsome silver match safe, which was attached to one end of the showy double watch-chain strung across his fancy vest, and handed over some matches to his companion, who relighted a half-smoked cigar.

"You won't have to smoke butts after next week, Tim," cried Joe boisterously. "I kinder thought I could land ye all right with Bill Bannon." He turned to Bruce. "Dugan's goin' to have a try-out behind the bat for the Beach," he explained. "I landed him, all right, and

This serial began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, fifteen cents each.

he'll deliver the goods. He'll be the makin' of the team; for it takes an experienced backstop to handle young pitchers and get the best work out of 'em. You oughter know what it means to have a good man on the receivin' end."

With a pair of grimy tongs the young smith seized the now dully glowing piece of hammered iron, and thrust it hissing into a half barrel of dark water. An odor suggestive of burning sulphur rose with the tiny cloud of steam, and smothered that other odor of liquor which seemed to ooze from the visitors.

"Mr. Dugan is in luck," said Bill, by way of being agreeable.

"Nit!" wheezed Dugan modestly. "It's his nibs, der manager over at der Beach, dat's in luck. W'y, he owned dat he was up against it for a catcher, an' he was even t'inkin' of givin' a high school kid a try at it. I'll show the Joshuays in dis hayseed league a few stunts behind der pan dat'll make 'em set up and take notice."

Vane was rolling a cigarette, a trick which he performed with the deftness of one in perfect practice.

"Now, don't you get the idee that this league is goin' to be made up of hayseeds, Tim," he cautioned, a bit resentfully, "'cause you'll fool yerself if ye do. They'll be a lot of scrappy youngsters on the teams, and some of em'll be sure to git inter fast perfessional comp'ny later on. Bannon tole me he'd picked up a bunch of the swiftest college players in the country, includin' one great college pitcher that was goin' to draw a fancy salary and live in swell style at the Sagamore. Say, Will, you're a chump to do this sort of dirty, sweaty, lonesome, backbreakin' work for the few measly ducats you can pick up at it, when you might be pullin' a fat envelope every week and havin' a snap, and no end of fun, playin' baseball. I can't see what you're a-thinkin' of."

Bill smiled grimly. "Perhaps you're right, Joe," he admitted; "but I have my reasons. Who is this great college pitcher?"

"It's a secret, and Bannon wouldn't tell his name. All he'd say was that the man was fast enough for the big leagues, and the Beach was dead lucky ter nail him. I'll bet he pulls a fancy salary; fer they've raised a big sum by subscription this year, and they say they're goin' ter scoop the pennant at any old price. If you'd went after this place you might 'a' got it yourself, Bill, my boy—who knows?"

"Perhaps so, but I never could have pitched on my college team again."

"Aw, rats!" sneered Dugan, leaning against the tool bench and making a slight miscalculation as to the distance, which caused him to bring up with a shock and an oath. "It's a ten-ter-one shot dis man Bannon's signed is fixed der same way you are; but you bet your bones dat won't bodder *him* none. He'll be handin' 'em up fer his college team next spring, jest der same; an' nobody'll never make no holler about it. Dey all do it, young feller, an' you're a chump dat you don't git inter der game."

"What's the dif' 'twixt playin' summer baseball for a salary and playin' college baseball for yer board and expenses, and mebbe a-gittin' somethin' more through advertisin' privileges on programmes or some other old way?" questioned Vane. "If you could investigate, Will, I'll bet you'd find plenty of sly blokes in Harvard, or Yale, or any other college, gettin' along one way or the other. P'r'aps you know for a fact that some fellers git special privileges?"

This was more of an interrogation than the statement of a possibility.

"Not with the knowledge of the faculty or the athletic board—not at Cambridge," asserted Bill positively. "It may be that in one or two rare instances some unfortunate but deserving man is quietly helped by a few fellows who band themselves together for that purpose; but I don't believe such cases are at all common, and I'm sure the facts are always kept from the athletic board."

"Now, don't you t'ink it," put in Dugan, with a slight hiccough, as he assumed a very wise and knowing air. "Don't you t'ink it, me boy! Dey're allus dead on, an' nine cases outer ten

dey pull der dough from der athletic funds an' let der little bunch of s'posed-ter-be generous guys distribute it to der athletes what are hired in dis very way to keep up der glorious standard of der college. An' then dey shoot off a lot of hot air 'bout perfessionalism! Wouldn't it make yer sick! Say, Joe, got anyt'ing left on yer hip? Me tongue is gittin' so dry it rattles in me mouth."

"Oh, I guess there's enough left to wet our whistles," replied Vane jocularly, bringing forth a half-emptied pint bottle from his hip pocket. "Here, Will, old slave—have a drink."

But Bruce declined to accept the uncorked and proffered bottle, saying: "You'll have to excuse me! I don't drink."

At this Vane shrugged his narrow shoulders, laughing in a sneering manner. "Why, what a model duck you are!" he cried. "You'll be sproutin' wings if you keep on. How d'yer do it at Harvard? The way them college fellers git lit up after they win a big baseball or football game, you'd never s'pose there was a solitary one of 'em that belonged to the white ribbon brigade. What's keepin' you on the sprinkler? 'Twouldn't s'prise me if it was some promise you made to your dear mamma before you went away to school."

"You're right about that," said Bill quietly, ignoring the fellow's sneer. "I gave my mother my word that I'd never touch liquor, and I shall keep that pledge. Her brother died with the tremens."

"Shuffled off with the D. T.'s, eh? And, havin' lost her brother like that, I s'pose she thinks everybody else that drinks is bound to kick the bucket the same way. That's about as much sense as a woman has; they're all alike, and they give me a cramp."

"Well, I'm gittin' a cramp waitin' fer that bot', pal," growled Dugan. "It's rotten bum booze dey peddle in dis prohibition county, but a man's gotter stan' fer it or drink hard cider, an' that stuff'll eat der linin' out a cast-iron stomach."

He drank from the bottle, permitting the liquor to run down his throat without seeming to swallow at all, until Vane cried out in alarm for him not to be a pig. Joe tried to imitate Dugan, who handed back the bottle without blinking, wiping his mouth on his coat sleeve; but the fiery stuff strangled Vane and set him to gasping and coughing violently. He was ashamed of this, as though he had betrayed some unmanly weakness; and, when he could get his breath, he sheepishly sought to make an excuse by saying that he had become so familiar with "good stuff" in Boston that he could not seem to get back into the habit of drinking the "barbed wire" that was sold in his native State.

Bill was ashamed on Joe's account, for quite another reason; but he had seen enough of the world to realize the folly of wasting good advice on a chap like Vane, especially on one in the fellow's present condition. Therefore, he silently turned again to his work at the forge and anvil.

Joe flung the empty bottle through an open window, and looked at his watch.

"Gittin' toward hash time, Tim," he said. "Wonder if the old woman knows we're back. I'll be able ter eat a dozen fried hemlock knots after tankin' up with that stuff. Say, Will, I'll find out who Bannon's great college pitcher is when he reports next Monday. All the other men will be at the Beach by Saturday, but the star slab artist has sent word he can't get along before Monday night. The Beach opens the season Tuesday with White Springs. Wednesday is the Fourth, and both the Beach and White Springs play Limeport in Limeport, where there's a celebration. Somethin' doin', my boy! If Bannon's bunch looks good to me, I'm goin' ter back 'em with my long green. S'pose you'll take in the celebration at Limeport, and of course'll you'll see one of the ball games, anyhow. Ther Beach plays in the afternoon."

"I don't know," said Bill doubtfully. "I hardly think I'll get over to the celebration. I'd like to see a game, but I think I'd better keep away. There may

be work to do here in the shop on the Fourth; if there isn't, I know there are lots of things that should be done around the house—things that have been neglected, and which no woman should do, especially one who has a sick man to look after, besides doing her regular housework."

"Oh, you poor slave!" mocked Joe, ready to depart with Dugan. "All you seem to think of is work. 'Course ther celebration won't be nuthin' great, but it'll keep lots of folks hereabouts from dyin' with dry rot. You're a lobster, anyhow, to waste your time here, when you might be havin' fun and makin' four or five times as much money."

Bruce worked steadily until supper time. As he removed his father's shiny black leather apron, he muttered to himself:

"Joe Vane may be right; perhaps I'm a fool, but I've got some of my father's blood in me, and he has been noted for his obstinate way of persisting in any course he might decide to pursue."

On Sunday Bill attended services in the little old white church, his mother remaining at home for the first time in many years, to sit beside old Duncan's bed and read to him from the Bible. Neither Ethel nor any of her family was in church, which was a decided disappointment to Bill, who had fancied that he might see her there as in the old days, when he used to crane his neck to steal a bashful glance at her from his father's pew, well down under the pulpit.

It must be confessed that he gave little heed to the dry sermon; for his mind persisted in speculating on the identity of the mysterious college pitcher who had been signed at a large salary, according to Joe Vane, by the manager of the Balsam Beach team. He wondered if the man could possibly be any one he had ever seen on any of the teams of the "big five," or was he some "phenom" from one of the smaller colleges? True, he had heard whispered rumors that certain stars, of other colleges besides Harvard, could be branded as professionals, if any one cared to investigate their careers; but he was disinclined to think it possible that any defender of the Crimson could be found in that despised class.

Buried in such thoughts, he was surprised when the congregation arose to sing the closing hymn, and he found that the old parson had finished his sermon. As soon as possible after the benediction, he hastened out of the church and away; but he could not escape several of the neighbors, who inquired about his father's condition, and expressed their pleasure over seeing him at home again. He was not at all inclined to "put on airs" with these people; but he had been touched by the fact, noted by his mother, that many recent callers at the house, although expressing sympathy, had somehow seemed to feel a certain ill-concealed satisfaction over his probable inability to finish his college course.

Jennie, with her pet lamb for company, was waiting for him at the back door, where her mother had permitted her to sit upon the step, so that she could not be seen by the church people on their way home.

On this day, at least, there was as little as possible of work about the Bruce home; and no play at all, with the permission of the parents. Nevertheless, Jennie spent two long, delightful afternoon hours with her beloved big brother, sitting beneath a shady tree down by the brook, whither he had carried her the greater part of the distance across the fields, the cosset lamb bleating pathetically after its mistress when stopped at the first fence.

Bill told her all about his life in Cambridge, which seemed to the child like some far land of mystery and romance; and when his methodless narrative finally brought him to speak of baseball and tell the story of the two great games in which he had participated, he unconsciously grew so realistic that the spell-enchanted little girl seemed to see the field, the contesting players, the great throngs of people; and in her ears sounded the crack of bat and ball, the music of the band, the singing and the cheering.

"Oh, Will!" she breathed, when he

had finished describing the joyous celebrations that had followed these victories. "Oh, Will, wasn't it grand!"

"It was," he said. "It paid me for all the years of hard work it cost me to get there."

The Fourth was no holiday for Bruce; for in the morning he shod a yoke of oxen and mended a broken harrow, and during the remainder of the day he busied himself about the house, finding, as he had expected, scores of things to be done. He even cleared the table, jestingly pretending that his mother was a lady in such affluent circumstances that she could afford to keep a maid, and that he was a raw importation from the Emerald Isle, Bridget O'Hoolihan by name.

As Bridget, his brogue was so delightful, and his remarks so funny, that Jennie laughed louder and longer than she had laughed in many a day; and when he put on his mother's big apron and prepared to wash the dishes, having informed Mrs. Bruce that the kitchen was no place for a "rale lady, mom, an' besoides, Oi don't want yez watchin' to see how many dishes Oi break," the little lame girl was so overcome by his comical manner of shaking the apron at the protesting mistress of the house that her merriment brought tears to her eyes. There were likewise tears in the eyes of Bill's mother, which she slyly brushed away, declaring that he was behaving ridiculously, but, as he was a stubborn Bruce, she supposed she would have to submit to being browbeaten by him.

Once, later in the day, Bill paused outside the back door and turned his face toward the southeast, where Limeport lay, thinking that at this hour one of the baseball games was in progress, and feeling a quickly crushed regret that fate had kept him from seeing it.

About nine o'clock on Thursday morning, Joe Vane entered the blacksmith's shop, in high spirits.

"Hey, Bill!" he cried. "You missed the game of yer life yisterday. Oh, it was a corker! Wow! Didn't we rub it into Limeport! You bet your sweet life—six to a frosty vacuum. Shut 'em out on their own ground, before the biggest bunch of howlin' people that ever saw a game in that smoky burg. That was goin' some, eh? Oh, say, but didn't it hurt 'em! Kemble—he's their manager—was sore as the devil. But they couldn't touch Brannon's star slab artist. Say, he's all right, Will; I've been knocked down to him. He's a swell duck, but he acts like a sport, and a good feller jest the same. He must have an iron arm. Went up against Limeport yisterday, after pitchin' the openin' game Tuesday at ther Beach and trimmin' ther Springs six to two. I reckon Brannon has to dig down deep to pay that lad his weekly dosh, but he's worth it. With him as mainstay, the Beach's got the pennant nailed a'ready."

"Who is this wonder?" asked Bill eagerly, resting his heavy hammer on the anvil and rolling his right sleeve higher, revealing a sinewy arm that was both strong and supple.

"Don't s'pose you could guess if you tried." Joe grinned tantalizingly. "Yit you oughter. He's a mighty well-known college twirler."

"I can't guess," confessed Bruce, "for I don't know of any well-known college pitcher I'd like to suspect of breaking the rules this way. I won't try. Who is he, Joe?"

"You know him pretty well."

"Is that so?"

"Sure. You've seen him lots of times."

"Have I?" said Bruce, puzzled and piqued. "He must be a man who is hard up, or else he'd never sell himself in such a way."

"That's where you're way off, old boy; his father's rich, and he don't have to play for money."

"Then he's a——" Bill checked himself abruptly. "What's the fellow's name, Joe?" he asked.

"Harold Kemp," answered Joe.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW PROBLEM.

Near the middle of the following forenoon, a top-buggy containing a brisk-appearing, dapper young man

stopped at the door of the blacksmith shop. The man sprang out at once, and hitched his horse to a ringbolt set in the heavy door casing, after which he entered the shop, pulling off his driving gloves.

"How do you do, Mr. Kemble," said Bruce, recognizing the druggist baseball manager of Limeport, and feeling an insupprèssible throb of excitement, caused by the instant conviction that he knew what business had brought the man there.

"How d'ye do," returned the visitor, sizing Bill up with a restless, critical eye. "You're Will Bruce, aren't you—old Duncan Bruce's son?"

"Yes, sir; Duncan Bruce is my father."

"Well, you're a husky-looking chap, and that's a fact!" Kemble nodded, with an air of approval that was meant to be most agreeable. "Long-geared, rangy, put up just about right. I understand your father's sick, and you're running his shop. Rather dull here, I should fancy. Pretty hard work for a young fellow, especially for a college man. It must be anything but pleasant."

"Oh, I don't know," returned Bill. "It isn't the kind of work I'd select; but it isn't so bad, and a man can do almost anything if it's necessary."

"Guess that's so," agreed the druggist, "though I can't imagine myself doing work of this sort. Can't be much money in it, either. I understand you're a baseball pitcher."

Bill knew what was coming; he had made no mistake in thinking he could divine the purpose of the man's visit.

"I've pitched some at school and college," he admitted.

"Did pretty well, too, eh? You pitched in both of Harvard's games with Yale this year, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Harvard won. That ought to be pretty fair evidence that you're a good man. But how does it happen that you're not playing summer baseball? There's more money in it than you can make shoeing horses."

"That's true, Mr. Kemble; but if I were to play baseball for money I'd make myself a professional, and that would bar me from playing on my college team."

"Oh, pshaw! Get out! That's all guff. Heaps of college men do it. They keep on playing with their college teams, just the same. I know; for I'm manager of the Limeports, and I've got one or two college chaps. The Beach team's made up almost wholly of college players. Their star twirler is Kemp, right off your own Harvard nine."

"That doesn't make it a whit less dishonorable," returned Bill warmly. "If it becomes known at Cambridge that Harold Kemp, or any other Harvard player, has accepted money for playing summer baseball, he'll be branded a professional and barred from the Harvard team."

"That may be true," said the Limeport manager, laughing; "but how will it ever become known? Who can prove that any of these fellows accept money? They're down this way rusticating. It's perfectly natural that they should have a little sport playing ball. They've signed no contracts. The most of them will take care that nobody sees them receive the money when they get their weekly salaries."

"But they know that they have broken the rules," persisted Bruce.

"That's all right; they're not going to be chumps enough to advertise it. Some of them resort to certain little expedients to cover their tracks. Over at the Beach some of 'em make a bluff at waiting on the tables at the Sagamore House. Once or twice a week they actually do a little work of that sort. You see, they can swear that was what brought them down here, and that they got into baseball for fun. Now, I've got a proposition to make to you. We need another first-class pitcher. I think you might fill the bill. Drop this dirty work, and come over to Limeport. I'll hire you to draw soda at the fountain in my store. You needn't put in much time at it. If you appear for half an hour or so, two or three days a week, and wear a white coat behind my soda slab, it will be enough to serve as a blind. The rest of the time you can

take it easy and play baseball when you are needed on the team. I'll pay you well for it."

Bill had listened quietly as Kemble hastily disclosed this plan to deceive, but he shook his head in a decisive way which told that the proposition met no favor with him.

"I wouldn't think of such a thing, Mr. Kemble," he said.

But the Limeport manager persisted.

"You've been working your way through college, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you've found it a hard pull, sure. You'll find it harder now that your father is knocked out. I've heard your father's property is mortgaged. That's bad. How do you expect to take care of that, support your folks and put yourself through college, by ordinary day labor? You can't do it."

"Perhaps not," admitted Bill.

"You can't do it," repeated Kemble, determined to impress the point. "You look like a fellow with sense. You know you can't do it. But you've got a talent by which you might make good money this summer. These college rules that make a man a professional if he plays ball for money are all wrong. They're ridiculous and unfair. They don't give a man a show. Such miserable rules ought to be broken. Why, lots of poor chaps never could get through college any other way. They simply have to play for money. They do it, too. Why shouldn't you? Your friend Kemp——"

Bill lifted a strong hand. "Don't call him my friend."

"Why, you both pitched on the Harvard nine! I supposed you would be friendly, under such circumstances."

"We are not."

"Well, never mind. He'll make enough money this summer so that he can cut a swell at Harvard. Fred Clark, of Limeport, saw Harvard play Yale in Cambridge this year. He says you're a better pitcher than Kemp. I'll give you twenty-five dollars a week to pitch for our team. That will be clean money; for we'll board you."

"It wouldn't be clean money if I took it under the conditions you have stated. I can't do it."

"How much do you want? Name your price." It was Kemble's settled belief that every man had a price.

Bruce was so quiet in his manner of saying that he would not take the matter into consideration at any price that the visitor fancied he was working for a better offer.

"Tell you what," he said suddenly, as though expecting to sweep Bruce off his feet, "I'll make it thirty-five a week. Think of that."

But the grim young smith declined to think of it, and Kemble betrayed signs of vexation.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "We've got to have you. We can't let the Beach get the jump on us. All the fans are howling, now. They're sore. It's ridiculous—it's too much, but hang me if I won't make it fifty! There you are—fifty dollars a week, and board. Five hundred dollars for ten weeks of baseball playing. You can shut up this old shop and come right along with me. I'll wait till you're ready. How long will it take you?"

It must be confessed that Bill was staggered a bit; but his jaw grew set, and a dogged look of obstinacy crept into his brown eyes.

"I shouldn't wait, if I were you, Mr. Kemble," he said; "for if you do you won't get back to Limeport until after the baseball season is over."

The visitor could scarcely believe that he had heard aright. He stared at the bare-armed, leather-aproned youth, in perplexed astonishment, doubt and incredulity.

"You don't mean you're going to turn down an offer like that, do you?" he finally managed to ask.

"I mean," explained Bill concisely, "that you can't raise money enough to hire me to play baseball in Limeport this summer."

Kemble's chagrin and disappointment bordered on disgust. "And I took you for a fellow of good sense!" he exclaimed. "Confound it—you're crazy—you're idiotic!"

Bruce was forced to smile. "Perhaps I seem that way to you, sir. I won't attempt to make you look at this matter from my viewpoint, for I'm sure I'd fail. You have my answer to your offer. My conscience will not permit me to play baseball for money at the present time."

The druggist whirled sharply, and walked to the door, nervously drawing on his driving gloves. On the point of leaving the shop, he stopped and turned.

"Young man," he said scornfully, "if you ever hope to make a success in this world, you'll have to stretch that narrow-gauge conscience of yours. Perhaps you'll come to your senses and change your mind. Think it over."

He unhitched his horse, jumped into the buggy, and turned back toward Limeport. Bill heard the wheels rumble over the piece of ledge that outcropped in the road halfway to the stream, and then he resumed work, whistling "Fair Harvard" somewhat untunefully.

At dinner that day Bill was cheerful almost to the point of jovial hilarity, and his exuberance enlivened and lightened the entire household. Even old Duncan smiled on him from the bolstering pillows, and made inquiries about affairs at the shop, receiving the assurance that everything was going along finely. When Bill returned to the shop, Jennie accompanied him, hopping along at his side with the aid of her crutch, the pet lamb capering about her.

Truxton Bigelow, coatless as usual, sat on the steps of Simon Vane's store, whittling a piece of soft pine. He eyed Bill languidly, and sighed.

"I'd give considerable," he muttered, "if I was only well and strong like him."

"Huh!" snorted the storekeeper, who had chanced to pause in the doorway and overhear the remark. "You're jest as able to work as he is; only he has to do it, and you let your wife s'port ye. Guess he'll find out before the summer's over that there's some diff'runce between blacksmithin' and playin' baseball. I notice he ain't slingin' on a great deal o' style sence he got home from college."

"I'll have to go over to the shop and have a talk with him some day," said Bigelow. "I've meant to, before this; but alwus I'm plumb done up by the time I've walked as fur as this, and I hev to stop here to rest. I uster have palpitation of the heart, an' it's sorter come back onter me ag'in lately. You know, my father he was took off with heart trouble."

"Yep, at the tender, youthful age of eighty-nine." Simon nodded sarcastically. "He was old enough to die, anyhow, and he'd never been sick a day in his life; so when he kicked the bucket sudden they called it heart disease. They had to lay it on su'thin'. You don't take arter your father a great deal, do ye, Trux?"

"Nope; I'm more like my mother. She was always delicate and ailin', and I cal'late I inherited her tendencies. Speakin' about baseball, I hear they're a-payin' mighty high for players over to the Beach and Limeport. I wonder why Will Bruce don't try to git onter one of them teams, instid of workin' like a dog in his father's shop. 'Course he could make lots more money at it."

"I dunno 'bout that, Trux; I ruther doubt it."

"Why, Sime, I've heerd that he's purty good in baseball."

"You kin hear 'most anything, Trux. If he did 'mount to much at it he'd be playin' somewhere instid of workin'; for my boy Joe says the managers of some o' these back country clubs is easy marks, and pay more money than they do in a lot of the reg'lar league teams. He says Bannon, over to the Beach, is shellin' out like a sucker, and ev'rybody's workin' him to last notch. You see, they don't really have to sign no contract when they hire on one of these teams; and so, arter they've shown that they're fast and got folks stuck on them, they purtend they've had a better offer from some club somewhere else, and make b'lieve they're goin' to leave. Everybody hears about it in short order, and then there is a howl goes up. Folks git after the manager and tell him he must keep his good players at any price; so the players git their sal-

aries raised out of all sense or proportion. No, I don't take no stock in them yarns about Will Bruce bein' much of a baseball player; for if he was he'd never stick to that shop and pound iron all summer when he could be gittin' three or four times as much money without doin' no real work at all."

Jennie, with the lamb nibbling near, played on a bit of green grass over by the high board fence. Bruce came out after an hour of steady work, and asked her what she was doing to amuse herself.

"Oh, I'm just pretending that I'm a married lady living in a fine house in a big city, and Nanny is a real fashionable caller that has dropped in. Do you think, Will, that, after I grow up, I'll ever get married and go away somewhere to a city to live? Do you suppose I'd enjoy it if I did? I couldn't do any housework, you know, because I'm lame; but I'd have hired help, wouldn't I?"

"Why, sure, you would," he answered heartily, resolved at once to avoid that first question. "All fine ladies who live in cities have servants."

"They must have an awful lot of money to afford more than one," said Jennie. "I don't understand why it is that some folks have so much more money than others. It doesn't seem just right to me."

"Tut—tut!" He laughed. "You're talking like a Socialist now, and socialistic theories are very unpopular with the plutocracy as a body, and also with the larger part of the self-satisfied bourgeois middle class."

She did not understand, but he had succeeded in diverting her from that dangerous point; and he left her still pretending that she was a lady, and talking to Nannie as she fancied a real lady would.

Some time later, hearing the lamb bleating lonesomely at the door, he looked up from his work and discovered Jennie sitting on her clean box near the tool-littered work bench. She had hopped in so softly that he had not heard her. She was sitting with drooping shoulders, wearing an expression of sadness that struck Bill like a knife-stab.

"What's the matter, Nen?" he asked. "Why have you stopped playing and come into this gloomy old shop?" He fancied that there were tears on her cheeks.

"I don't want to play married lady any more, Will," she replied.

"Oh, tired of it?"

"No, only just—— What's the use to play I'm something I never can be, anyhow? Nobody'd want a lame wife that had to walk with a crutch."

He dropped his work and did his best to cheer her, succeeding after a time in diverting her thoughts into another channel; but for the remainder of the afternoon he was depressed by the pathos of her misfortune, and by the knowledge that she had begun to realize that it must affect her entire life.

Turning the corner of the house, on his way to the back door at supper time, he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Pegger's hideous plaid shawl in the kitchen. The widow was there with a copy of a week-old newspaper in her hand. She greeted him with a snuffle and a sneeze.

Jennie, her thin hands clasped in her lap, a strange look of eagerness on her face, was sitting on a low stool, the crutch lying beside her. Mrs. Bruce was taking up the supper.

"I've judst been readi'g the modst wodderful thi'g to your mudther, Will," explained the visitor. "I saw id in this paber, a'd I brode id ride over. Id's all aboud a celebraded dogder who is curi'g labe childred with hib disease judst the sabe as liddle Jeddie has, a'd he dode use any idstruments or do any cuddi'g. Here's the piece, ride here, a'd you cad read id yourself. Woddend id be sple'did if you only had enough moddey to tage Jeddie to thad dogder a'd have hib cure her so she could wog like odther peoble?"

"You can't believe everything you read in the papers, Mrs. Pegger," said Bill. "Besides, if it is true, of course the doctor who performs these wonderful operations charges enormous fees for his services."

"No, iddeed, nod id the cases of poor

peoble. The paber says he perforbs some oberations for nodthing. If you odly had moddey enough to pay egsbenses, maybe he would cure your sisder. I've god to go hobe a'd gid my subber, bud I'll leave the paber so you cad read aboud id yourself. A-a-achoo —a-choo! Goodness gracious! I do believe I've cod more code, rudding oud id such a hurry."

Bruce made a struggle to be cheerful at supper; but this attempt was transparently an effort at deception, and it proved to be a discouraging failure; so he finally gave it up. Although he refrained from looking directly at his sister, he knew that she was watching him, as though seeking some signal of hope or encouragement in his face. When the meal was over she brought him the paper and asked him to read the piece, and she continued to watch him as he complied.

"Do you think it's true, Will?" she asked, when he had finished.

Behind the child's back Mrs. Bruce made a warning sign.

"I don't know, Nen," he answered, lifting her to his lap and holding her close. "As I told Mrs. Pegger, the papers print many things that are not true."

"But if it is so, and this great doctor could just see me, he might cure me so I'd never be lame any more, so I could run and play like other little girls, and so when I grow up I could be a real married lady and have a home like other folks."

There was a lump in his throat. "Perhaps when you grow older you'll get over your lameness, anyhow. A long time ago Dr. Proctor, of Limeport, said it was possible you might outgrow your lameness."

She shook her head. "I don't think I can ever get well like that," she said, with an air of judgment too deep for her years; "for it seems as though I was getting worse instead of better. Unless some one like this great doctor can help me, I've just got to be a cripple all my life."

That night Bill Bruce slept poorly; for he felt that a new and troublesome problem had entered his life—a problem that might break down his resolutions and change his whole career.

CHAPTER XXI.

THREADS OF FATE.

Bill paused at his work, and turned toward the door of the shop, through which a hay-scented breeze bore a sudden commotion of sounds, growing rapidly more and more distinct—the clatter of horses' hoofs, the fierce barking of a dog, shouts of men, and the frightened scream of a woman. With swift strides, he reached the door, and beheld the cause of the disturbance.

Benson's ugly mongrel dog was in hot pursuit of a frightened horse that bore, clinging desperately to the horn of her saddle, a blonde-haired girl in riding costume. Three other riders, two young men and a middle-aged woman, were following; and Bruce knew that it was the woman who had uttered that scream of fear. One of the young men was close upon the dog, and suddenly he leaned far over, having reversed his riding whip, and struck the creature such a blow with the heavy butt of the implement that the snarling yellow beast was sent rolling over and over in the dust of the road.

That settled the dog; with his tail between his legs, he turned and made for his home by the shortest course, while the young man who had delivered the blow spurred on, overtook the frightened horse that bore the girl, seized the bit, and brought the animal to a full stop, at some distance beyond Vane's store. The girl had retained some degree of self-possession, and, although she was quite pale, she betrayed no symptoms of swooning or collapse.

Bill Bruce reached the road and saw the second young man, a little chap with bulging eyes and a familiar look, go bouncing past, hanging to his mount with immense difficulty. The woman rider followed closely, and she appeared to be far more frightened than her horse, which was easily reined down, seeming disposed to stop of its own accord when the excitement was over.

The lady promptly tumbled off into the arms of the little chap, who had likewise dismounted with more haste than grace, and who, finding himself embarrassed by such a burden, relinquished the bridle of his horse and applied his entire attention and both arms to the task of preventing the lady from sinking in the dust.

Opportunely, Joe Vane had rushed out from his father's store, capturing and holding the busy young man's horse. The animal bearing the empty side-saddle exhibited no disposition to run away, but Joe seized him also by the bit.

There was no necessity for the young smith to offer assistance, nor was he disposed to do so, having discovered by this time that the four strangers in Fogg's Corners were no strangers to him. This discovery sent him back to his labor when he had assured himself that he was not mistaken; for he had no wish to be seen gaping with the idle curiosity of a yokel.

But, no matter how he might wish it, he was not to escape observation thus simply. The man who had checked the dog with that sure, strong-armed blow came leading one of the horses into the semi-gloom of the shop, and addressed Bill.

"This horse has cast a shoe, my man," he said patronizingly. "Get busy right away and set another in place of it, will you?"

Bruce turned from the forge and faced Harold Kemp.

"The devil!" said Kemp.

"We've met before," said Bill. "Never mind introducing yourself."

Kemp glared. "Can you set a horseshoe?" he finally asked, with an air of conscious superiority and contempt that made Bill feel a strong desire to hit him.

"Hitch your horse over there," directed the young smith, "and I'll do the job when I'm done with this bit of work." And, ignoring the autocratic, impatient fellow, he deliberately pursued his task to its completion.

Harold Kemp hesitated, a flush of anger rising to his face; but finally, shrugging his shoulders, he led the horse to the side of the shop and hitched him to a ringbolt.

Voices sounded at the door, and Twiddy Traddles appeared, followed by Marion Mayhew and her mother, both of whom, holding up their long riding skirts, hesitated in the doorway.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Mayhew, "what a dreadfully dirty place! Don't touch anything, Marion, for if you do you'll certainly get smooched."

Traddles was babbling. "Another golden opportunity lost. I've always yearned to do something heroic, but whenever I get the chance I flunk. I've got my father to thank for it, too. My mother is a courageous woman—as brave as a lion; while my father is just about as brave as a rabbit. Their blood commingles in my veins. Under ordinary circumstances, when there is no peril and no chance to distinguish myself, I am my mother's son, and I long to perform noble and hazardous deeds; but the moment anything happens to give me the chance, under stress of excitement, I am dad's boy, and just about the biggest coward that ever came down the pike. I think, ladies, if you'll excuse me, I'll solace my agitated nerves with a cigarette."

"Poor Twiddy!" said Marion, laughing. "You did your part nobly; you supported mamma and kept her from mussing herself by falling right there in the road."

"That's very true, indeed," agreed Mrs. Mayhew. "Only for you, Twiddy, I know I should have flopped. I was frightened horrid by that nasty dog, and when my horse began to go so fast I was bounced till I thought it would jar my teeth loose. I know it must have shaken my hair down. Marion, how is my *coffer?*"

Traddles offered Kemp the cigarettes, and Harold took one.

"How long will it take to fix your nag up, Hal?" inquired the little chap, striking a match and holding it for Kemp to get a light.

"Ask him," growled Harold, with a jerk of his head toward Bruce.

Twiddy turned to do so, and got his

first square look at the leather-aproned, bare-armed fellow at the forge. His jaw drooped, and the cigarette would have fallen, had it not clung tenaciously to his moistened lower lip.

"'Pon my soul," he finally gasped, "it's Bill Bruce—our Bill—good old Bill!"

Bruce smiled grimly, and gave Traddles a nod as he grasped with tongs the piece of work he had just finished, and thrust it hissing into the half barrel of water.

"I'll attend to Mr. Kemp's horse immediately," he said.

"Good gracious!" breathed Marion, also greatly surprised. "Is it that—that person? What is he doing here?"

Mrs. Mayhew surveyed the grimy smith as she might have looked upon a curious and interesting animal.

"Who is it, Marion?" she asked. "It can't be any one you know."

"It's that fellow they put in to pitch for Harvard in the Yale games when everybody went to see Harold pitch," explained the girl, lowering her voice a little, yet speaking loudly enough for Bill to hear every syllable. "It was the meanest shame I ever heard of, and I told Walter Whitney so myself."

"But, my dear," said her mother, speaking with even less effort to prevent Bruce from hearing, "you don't mean to tell me that this—this common, dirty person is a student at Harvard, a college patronized by the *boo mondy*, the very *eelight* and most aristocratic young men? Such a thing is perfectly preposterous!"

Then the lady wondered why Bill laughed as he examined the feet of the horse one by one and made ready to fit and set a shoe in place of the one that was missing.

Kemp stood watching, impatiently tapping his leg with the riding crop that had ended the sport of Benson's dog. Mother and daughter, vulgarly snobbish and ill bred, were amusing to Bruce; but Kemp, silently sneering and insolently superior, was irritating to a degree that made it difficult for Bill to repress his resentment. Traddles, as usual, was amiss; yet he seemed to feel a touch of shame over the wretchedly bad breeding of the Mayhews; for he made a half-hearted effort to be agreeable to Bill, asking a few foolish, fidgety questions of a personal nature, which the young smith answered a bit curtly while pumping the bellows.

Joe Vane came in as Bruce was burning the shoe into place on the carefully pared hoof of the horse. He was proud of his acquaintance with Kemp, toward whom he bore himself as one who feels it a fine privilege to be recognized and treated with tolerant friendship by a person of finer clay.

"Say, but you did give old Benson's cur a soaker, Mr. Kemp!" he chuckled. "Wisht you'd finished the critter. He's a nuisance. I've took care of the other nags. Bruce'll have this one fixed up all right in short order. He knows his business, Will does. You two sports oughter be well acquainted, both havin' pitched on the same Harvard team. I've been tryin' to git Will to chuck this dirty work and try for a posish in the league; but he's got some old-woman notions about playin' for money, and he won't do it."

Kemp snapped the remnant of his cigarette spinning into the little pile of sweepings and scraps near the anvil.

"He's right," he said; "and I dare say he'll be far more successful by sticking to his horseshoeing." It was a sneer at Bill's ability as a pitcher, but the young smith seemed too busy to hear, or to heed if he heard.

"Dear me," fussed Mrs. Mayhew, sniffing at the wisp of smoke which had curled upward as the hot shoe was deftly and quickly pressed upon the horse's hoof; "what a dreadful odor! And I haven't my *vinegaretty* with me."

Vane made haste to offer Kemp his cigarettes, selecting and lighting one himself, the smoke of which he inhaled, while seeking to manipulate it in imitation of the swagger mannerisms of the other.

Having cooled the horseshoe by plunging it in water, Bruce returned, secured the uplifted foot of the horse between his knees, and began swiftly and deftly nailing the shoe in place.

"Crickey!" said Traddles, attentively watching the process. "That's deuced clever, Bill—deuced clever. My word, I don't see how you ever learned the trick!"

Bruce was rasping off the projecting points of the nails and smoothing the hoof, when Ethel Vane paused in the door and called her brother. She was attired, with unusual taste, in a light summer dress, and her flaxen hair was dressed becomingly in imitation of a picture she had seen in a magazine. Never in her life had she looked prettier, and Kemp gave her a stare of surprise and admiration.

"Mother wants to see you before you go to the Beach to-day, Joe," she said. "She's got an errand for you."

Grumbling beneath his breath about the old woman always wanting something, Vane followed her as she slowly turned back, having first met Harold Kemp's stare with a flitting, fleeting, coquettish glance.

"I say, Joe—just a moment!" called Hal, hastening after them and pretending to have a word of some importance for Vane.

Ethel paused, as though waiting for her brother, and Joe improved the opportunity to introduce Kemp, who bowed and smiled over her seemingly hesitating hand, expressing his pleasure at meeting Vane's sister, in language and manner that brought a flood of color to her cheeks.

Bill had dropped the horse's hoof, and he stood watching them, frowning deeply. Mrs. Mayhew and her daughter likewise were disturbed, the woman venting her vexation in muttered words, while Marion bit her lip and tossed her head, her eyes flashing. Tweed Traddles chuckled with his usual asinine simplicity, and observed that Kemp had a keen eye for beauty.

Returning to the shop, Harold glanced back to get a last glimpse of the girl before she vanished beyond the high board fence.

"You seem exceedingly interested in your new acquaintance, Hal," said Marion, unable to repress her annoyance.

"She's a devilish pretty girl," declared Kemp; "a genuine country pink."

"But she's like all country girls," put in Mrs. Mayhew disdainfully. "They're frightfully raw and uncultured, and they know absolutely nothing of the *fine esses* of life. Put them into high society and they all make the most dreadful *fox paws.*"

Kemp saw that Bruce had completed his work, and, with the same crushing superiority, produced his money and asked how much he was to pay. When told, he attempted to add half a dollar as a tip.

"You've made a mistake," said Bill, refusing to accept the amount. "That's fifty cents too much."

"That's all right," nodded Hal. "Take it, my good fellow."

But Bill disdainfully declined, and Kemp was compelled to return the piece of silver to his pocket, which he did with a shrug and a laugh that was the essence of an insult.

When they were gone, Bill drew a breath of relief.

"Some day," he growled, "Harold Kemp will get what's coming to him from me, and I shall take great pleasure in delivering the goods."

CHAPTER XXII.

SHATTERED HOPES.

Jennie slept so late on Sunday morning that Bill's mother sent him to call her. The door of her room being slightly ajar, he discovered her still in bed, and tiptoed softly in, to arouse her with a kiss. By the bed he paused, suddenly stabbed by her delicate, almost ethereal look, and by the expression of pathetic hopelessness and resignation that was beginning to leave an imprint upon her. As he stooped to touch her thin cheek with his lips, she smiled and murmured in her sleep; a moment later her eyes opened, and she saw him bending over her.

"Good morning, Nen," he said, with a laugh. "I'm afraid I spoiled a pleasant dream."

"Oh, such a lovely dream!" she breathed. "I thought the wonderful

doctor had cured me without hurting me one bit, and that I could walk and run just as well as anybody. I'm sorry you woke me, Will. If I could only keep on dreaming that dream forever!"

It was the last blow at the breastworks of his already wavering resolution. His face did not betray his sudden surrender, but somewhere within him he seemed to feel something give way.

"Nen," he said quietly, "little sister, your dream may come true."

She sat up quickly, seeking to put her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Will—oh, Will!" she cried, in childish excitement. "How can it come true? Mother says it would cost so much, and we haven't the money."

He hugged her slender form tight in his powerful arms, and kissed her again.

"Don't ask questions, Nen," he said. "Just leave it to me. I've always found a way to do anything I really wanted to do, and I am going to take you to that doctor."

That Sabbath was drearily long to Bill, who could not remember the time when he had not dreaded the coming of this day of the week, given over by his parents to rigorous religious devotion, and throughout which in that household any remote approach to mirth, or even to a mild outward show of pleasure, was sternly suppressed. Jennie remained to sit beside old Duncan, who was beginning to show some signs of improvement, and Bill escorted his mother to church in the morning.

As on the previous Sunday, he profited little by the sermon, his mind being occupied by other matters. After the service, however, he was compelled to wait for his mother, who was immediately surrounded by commiserating neighbors, asking about her husband and expressing gratification to learn that he seemed to be "on the mend."

Mrs. Pegger sniffed and elbowed her way forward, and gave Mrs. Bruce a black-mitted hand. Her week-day shawl of plaid had retired in favor of one of shiny black silk, fringed and well worn.

"I'm very glad to see you oud to churgh agaid, Mis' Bruce," she declared. "We missed you so mudge last Sudday. Howdy, Will. How're you, a'd how is liddle Jeddy? She's sudge a sweed chide, a'd id is sudge a piddy she must alwads be labe, when she mide be cured by thad gread dogder if you odly had the moddey to tage her to hib for treadment. But I suppose thad's oud of the quedshun, now that your poor fadther is sig a'd never will be able to worg no more. I dode see how you're goi'g to be able to go bag to college, yourself; for somebody's god to tage care of the fabbily, and ev'ry neighbor I've talked with seebs to thi'g you'll have to give ub your notion of gidding a fine education, a'd stay hobe a'd rud your fadther's shob. Of course, id'll be priddy hard for you to give ub your gread plads; but you've god to do your dudy, a'd the good Lord knows we all have our trials a'd tribulations id this world. Achoo—a-a-choo! Goodness sages! I do wish they'd keeb the widdows shud in this churge, so there wouldn't always be a draved."

"Will," said his mother, as they were walking homeward, "it is a great shame that your people ha' come to be such a load upon ye, lad. If only your father hadna got into the law wi' Simon Vane, this trouble the Lord ha' let come upon us wouldna keep ye from college."

"Don't you worry about that, mother," he said quickly. "I'll make my way somehow. The very fact that some folks seem to rejoice over our misfortunes simply makes me all the more determined. I'll get there yet."

His unshaken courage and confidence filled her with admiration, even while she could not conceive of any possible means by which he could attain his ambition.

Nearly an hour before noon the next day, Bill closed and locked the shop. Going to the house, he changed his working clothes for the best suit he possessed, which, although it had been carefully kept, showed signs of wear and was scarcely up to the season in style. His mother looked at him in surprise when he came down to dinner.

"Why, Will," she said, "where are ye going, lad, that ye ha' dressed up so?"

"I'm going over to the Beach, mother," he answered. "I've cleaned up all the work in the shop, and I feel that it will do me good to take a half holiday. I need a little diversion, and the Limeport baseball team plays at the Beach this afternoon."

She looked at him doubtfully. "How'll ye get over there?" she asked. "Ye ha' na team to take ye."

"Then I'll use Shanks' mare. Now, don't be disturbed, mother. I'm not going to neglect my work, and I'm going for a good reason, which I'll explain on my return."

He had not covered a mile of the road when he was overtaken by Asher Mullen, wearing his heavy coat and scarf, as usual, and bound for the Beach with butter and eggs. Bill readily accepted an invitation to ride.

"How's it happen you're footin' it over this way t'day, Will?" asked Mr. Mullen curiously. "Ain't goin' to the Beach to rusticate with the fashionable folks, be ye?"

"Hardly," replied Bill, smiling. "I didn't happen to have any work on hand at the shop, and I took a fancy to see a baseball game this afternoon."

The farmer clucked to the slightly limping horse.

"Shet up shop, did ye?" he said. "Mebbe you'll lose a job; somebody may come with a hoss to be shod, or somethin'. Your father always stuck close to his business, and folks knowed they could depend on findin' him at the shop. That's how he prospered, and he'd be purty fairly well fixed if he hadn't got inter that lawsuit with Sime Vane. Lawin' is bad business; the pesky lawyers alwus git the best end of it. But my sympathy alwus was mainly with your father. Sime is narrer as a cow path through a scrub pasture. I can't do business with him no more. He wants both ends and a piece outer the middle ev'ry time—pays the meanest prices for everything, and then makes you take it out in trade. That way he ketches a feller both comin' and goin'.

"They've opened a new boardin' house over to the Beach, and I've made arrangements to furnish butter for twenty-four cents a pound and aigs at twenty cents a dozen, cash, and I'll have a market for consider'ble of my garden truck as fast as it comes on. Sime Vane won't squeeze me no more while the season lasts. If he'd been decent and fair 'bout that dividin' line, there wouldn't 'a' been no lawsuit, and your folks wouldn't be so hard put to it now that your father is down on his back."

"There may have been right and wrong on both sides," admitted Bill. "That's nearly always the case."

"Mebbe so—mebbe so!" Mullen nodded wisely. "But it's goin' to be mighty tough on you, gittin' upset in your ambition for a college eddication. You've studied hard and worked hard to git to college, and it must grind ye some to be knocked outer it now."

"I haven't given it up by any means, Mr. Mullen."

"Sho! Ain't ye?"

"No, indeed."

"I don't see how you're goin' to keep on at college and keep things runnin' to home. You certain can't do it blacksmithin' summers and vacations. I'm afeared your plans are clean upsot, Will. Giddap, Betsey! You're slower'n cold merlasses."

Bill felt a sudden desire to impart a confidence to this sociable, friendly, well-meaning old man.

"I'm going over to the Beach to look for a job," he said.

"Really? You don't mean it! Well, now, I declare! What sort of a job?"

"Playing baseball."

"Whew! Is they much money in that?"

"Yes, it pays well."

"It don't seem possible. But don't you think it'll be purty bad policy, shettin' up the shop at the Corners? Folks'll be kinder sore over it when they find out you're off playin' baseball, and they'll git to takin' their work somewheres else."

"If I can get a place pitching on one of the teams in the Pine Tree League, I'll make almost as much money in a

few weeks as I could by working a year at the shop."

"You don't say!" cried Mr. Mullen incredulously. "I never heard o' such a thing."

"But," added Bill, suppressing any sign of regret, "I can never play again on my college team; for I shall be rated as a professional."

"That don't seem jest right; but still, I don't s'pose it makes much difference to you."

"It makes a great difference. If I had no one but myself to think of, there isn't money enough in this county to hire me to play baseball while I am still in college."

Asher Mullen shook his head slowly and uncomprehendingly. "You're a queer sort, Will," he said; "not much like most young fellers they raise round these parts. But I cal'late you've got a purty level head, and I'll resk ye—I'll resk ye. You'll come out all right somehow, for you've alwus had grit and perseverance. I wish ye good luck, boy."

They talked in this manner all the way to the Beach. Some time before they could see the ocean, Bill began to inhale long breaths; for the air had become permeated with the salt tang of the sea, and it gave him a delightful feeling of vim and vigor, in strong contrast to the sense of oppressive heaviness produced by the hot inland atmosphere. Afar they could hear the roar of the surf as it rolled on the sandy shore; and, save for a dull sensation of regret, he would have felt like shouting when at last the great, combing, foam-capped breakers and the broad blue expanse of the open ocean came into view.

Balsam Beach wore its usual summertime holiday atmosphere. Flags were flying from the staffs in front of the two big hotels, and above the lawns of several cottages. There were many people—gentlemen, ladies and children, all in light summer attire—to be seen upon the verandas and in the vicinity of the hotels. Smart rigs, drawn by spirited horses with shining coats and cropped tails, whirled along the streets. Many people were bathing in the surf, and many more, sitting under umbrellas or strolling upon the shore, were watching them. At the pier lay a small white excursion steamer. Numerous small boats were moving to and fro, rolling and dipping on the swells, and at least a score of snowy sails could be seen out beyond the southern point, on which stood the cylindrical white lighthouse.

A trolley car, "loaded to the guards," rolled in and discharged its passengers at the end of the line near the Sagamore. It was a crowd of "fans" from Limeport, accompanying their baseball team to the battlefield. With his men, who were carrying bags of bats, Bruce saw the dapper druggist manager of the Limeports. He hastened after the man, and overtook him.

"How do you do, Mr. Kemble," he said.

"Why, hello!" cried Kemble. "What are you doing here? Come over to see the game, eh?"

"I'd like a word with you, if you have the time."

The manager snapped out his watch. "What is it?" he asked.

"I've changed my mind, sir. I'm ready to accept the offer you made me."

Kemble whistled. "Oh-ho!" he cried. "Come to your senses, have you? I thought you would. But it's too late, now."

"Too late?" said Bill, feeling a strange throb of mingled dismay and relief. "You mean——"

"I've got a pitcher—Condon, of Tufts. He's going to pitch to-day. I don't need you. You were a chump not to snap me up when I came after you. Come over to the field and watch Condon make monkeys of the Beachites."

Bill stood watching the crowd straggling up the street toward the baseball field. Although he was disappointed, there was in his heart a feeling of relief, amounting almost to gladness. After all, though he had come to the point of sacrificing himself for his sister, the opportunity was no longer open. He had brought himself to it, sorrowfully thinking that never again would

he wear a Harvard uniform; but now he would go back to the blacksmith's old shop at Fogg's Corners, and somehow he would find a way to return to Cambridge, and when the baseball season came round again he would pitch for the Crimson. He laughed.

Then he was smitten by a sudden sense of selfishness that checked his laughter instantly. Perhaps he might succeed in returning to college unsullied by the taint of professionalism; but what would become of Jenny? That he might play baseball on his college team, that he might pitch for Harvard, he was willing to let pass this possible chance for little Nen to be cured of her lameness. He would taste again the joys of fiercely fought baseball contests; in his ears would ring the cheers of admiring throngs; he might become the hero and idol of his college comrades—but his unfortunate sister would remain a cripple for life, because of his unworthy thirst for approbation and popularity. The thought of this would trouble him forever; whenever his eyes rested on her halting figure and on her thin, pathetic face, he must feel condemned and conscience-stricken, and despise himself for his meanness.

He went striding up the street toward the baseball field, soon coming in sight of the enclosure, which was surrounded by a high board fence. Above the covered grand stand a flag was languidly flying in the faint breeze that came from the sea. A steady stream of people flowed in by the gate. He got into line, and paid a quarter for admission.

Bill's heart gave a throb as he looked around and saw the grand stand, already filled to overflowing with ladies and gentlemen in summer apparel, while the bleachers behind the white-chalked lines from the plate to first and third bases were rapidly being taken by those arriving. A hum of voices was in the air. The Beachites, in loose gray suits, were practicing. Harold Kemp, handsome, graceful, self-possessed, and conscious, as usual, of his own fine appearance, was limbering his arm, Dugan catching for him.

The plunk of the ball into Dugan's mitt sent a tingling thrill over Bruce, and filled him with sudden intense longing to handle the sphere. The crack of bat and ball, as a man clipped out a hot grounder to the infield, made that longing an obsession.

With the exception of Dugan, who seemed wholly out of place among them, the Balsam Beach players were a clean, wholesome-looking bunch of youngsters.

Bill discerned the manager, whom he knew by sight, standing near the home team's bench. Slipping under the rail in front of the bleachers, he walked swiftly toward the man.

Bannon turned as his name was spoken. Without faltering, Bruce introduced himself and asked for a trial at pitching.

"Oh, Bruce—Bruce of Harvard?" said the manager. "I know about you. Had an eye on you, and I'd made a proposition to you after that last Yale game, if I hadn't got hold of another man I was fishing for. You live over at Fogg's Corners, don't you? Yes? Well, I can't do anything with you now. My pitching staff is full. Kemp is a corker. I was lucky to get him. You see, he's summering here—stopping at the Sagamore. No, can't do a thing for you now. However, if anything happens to any of my pitchers and I need a man to fill in, I'll let you know."

This time there was nothing but bitter disappointment in Bill's heart. He turned away dejectedly.

"I can't stay here and watch the game," he thought. "I can't!"

He made straight for the gate, and passed out.

Behind him, the Limeport crowd cheered suddenly as their team, in playing suits, trotted out from the dressing room beneath the grand stand.

TO BE CONTINUED.

McDonough's Double

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Come-On," "The Shannon Syndicate," Etc.

Did you ever come unexpectedly face to face with the realization that there was somewhere another person so closely resembling you that one of his intimate acquaintances, mistaking you for him, tries to close a business deal with you? Of course, in such a contingency, the proper thing to do is to point out the error and go on your way. But suppose you do not—what then? "Big Jim" had an experience of this sort. Read, and learn what happened to him

HEN the train stopped, Big Jim McDonough looked out, saw that the name of the station was Greenville, and returned to his newspaper. At the end of ten minutes the line of cars was still motionless, and he wondered why. For, so far as he could see from the car window, the town was not important enough to halt the Chicago express for three minutes, let alone ten. Other passengers walked up and down the plank platform; still others disappeared up the streets. When the time grew to fifteen minutes, McDonough became impatient, and went out to see what the trouble was.

The station agent told him that there was a pitch-in ahead. A freight, mostly flats with rough boxes and dressed lumber, was an utter mess across the right of way. Moreover, the wrecking train was not yet on the ground.

"You've lots of time to go uptown, colonel," said the agent.

McDonough did not particularly wish to investigate the beauties of Greenville; but, if the train was laid out for several hours, something had to be done to put in the time. He nodded, accepting the title of colonel as one of courtesy merely, inspired by his bulk and dignified appearance.

For, when it came to stage presence, nobody had anything on Big Jim. Men liked and respected him on sight—and were apt to regret it subsequently. He looked the part of the elderly, cultured gentleman of means; and this was an invaluable asset to him. His white, well-kept mustache and upright carriage gave him a military aspect; his expression was dignified, yet genial, and benevolent in the extreme. But, behind this apparent benevolence and geniality, he owned a case-hardened nerve and calculating audacity. For over forty years he had lived by his wits, aided thereto by other peoples' lack of them; and in the process he had acquired a most extensive knowledge of human nature. The older he grew, the smoother he got; and at the time when he formed an alliance with Charlie Smith and Frank Duprau, both expert con men, there was no more successful operator in the business.

Just then he had nothing on hand. The trio had, some months before, turned a series of highly profitable tricks, and, not wishing to crowd their luck, had deemed it advisable to lie low for a while. Now McDonough, footloose and on his way to Chicago to meet his partners, was merely, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up. But he did not expect anything to turn up in Greenville.

As he made his dignified way into the main part of the town, a man in

shirt sleeves, standing before a livery stable across the road, nodded to him. Big Jim returned the nod carelessly. He did not know the man, and was quite sure that the latter did not know him. Perhaps, he reflected, Greenville was one of those primitive communities in which it is considered the proper thing to greet everybody; or, more likely, the liveryman would have no objection to furnishing him with a team and driver for an hour or two.

Greenville, upon investigation, offered few points of interest to the casual visitor. The town did not differ materially from hundreds of others. There was one main street, and a couple more with unfulfilled ambitions crossed it at right angles; these formed the business section. Beyond it were tree-shaded streets, evidently residential. Away to the right, beside the river, were tall iron smokestacks; glaring, shed-like structures; and piles of lumber, marking the location of mills whence the faint, exactly spaced drone of rending saws bit continuously into the morning air.

At the end of the main street McDonough turned, crossed over, and came back on the other side. A drink of something cool would not be amiss, he thought; he sincerely hoped that the line would be repaired, and his train sent on with as little delay as possible. As he walked he inspected the show windows idly, coming to a halt before one in which was a display of fishing tackle. Such gear always touched a soft spot in his heart, and he gazed through the pane at the cards of flies, braided silk lines, spoon-baits, reels and rods, with all the rapture of a child before a toy window. From this absorption he was aroused by a voice behind him.

"Goin' fishin', colonel?"

Big Jim wheeled with a deliberation which proved the excellent state of his nerves, since a man of his occupation dislikes to be suddenly addressed anywhere. The speaker was a man of middle age, solid, big, with bristling red hair and a heavily undershot jaw which clamped a cigar between its back molars; his eyes were of a light blue, prominent and staring, and his expression was both aggressive and crafty. He smiled knowingly, as a man smiles who catches another in a trifling sidestep from the straight and narrow business path. His hand was outstretched in greeting, but he was an entire stranger to McDonough.

Big Jim, on general principles, shook hands heartily. "I'd like nothing better than to have a good fish," said he.

"And how are you, and how did you leave everything at home?" queried the stranger.

McDonough, who never acted on impulse, reflected while he said that everything at home was looking well. Surely the con game did not flourish in Greenville! If a stranger had handed him an old one like that in a town with tall buildings, he would have laughed, made the high sign, and passed on. But this stranger bore none of the earmarks of the steerer, and it was ridiculous to suppose that he, Big Jim McDonough, looked like an easy mark.

It flashed across his mind that the station agent had addressed him as colonel; the liveryman had nodded to him; and now he was again addressed as colonel by a solid-looking individual.

The title itself was a favorite one of his. It gave an impressive finish to various euphonious aliases engraved upon the best quality of pasteboard, and he used it often in his business. But it was extremely unlikely that this was known to two or more men in Greenville, where he had never been before and hoped he would never be again.

On the whole, it looked like a case of mistaken identity. For a moment he was tempted to say so, accept apologies, and continue on his way. But it was not his habit to point out a mistake to any one. He prided himself on never overlooking a bet, and it occurred to him that, if he looked so much like somebody else, there might be something in it. If the stranger discovered his error, it would be a good joke. If he didn't—well, anyway, it would pass the time.

"You're looking ten years younger," said the red-haired man. "Your face has filled out, and you're heavier. Your voice is stronger and heartier, too. Nothing like sea air to set a man up, eh! When did you get back? Heffernan told me you weren't expected for a couple of weeks."

"I *am* a little ahead of my time, I guess," replied Big Jim evasively. "Thanks, I'm feeling first-rate."

"Great chaps, those German specialists," said the red-haired man, gnawing his cigar. "Any time I get run down I'll go over there to be fixed up, you bet your life." He eyed McDonough closely. "You don't only *look* younger; you *are* younger. You're different, somehow. Must be a fine system they have! Going to be in town long?"

"No longer than the train," answered McDonough. He explained. "Going on to Chicago."

The red-haired man pinched his lower lip between finger and thumb, and tugged at it. "They can't clear the line for two hours, anyway. Say, come around to my office; I want to talk to you. And then, if there's time, we'll have lunch together. My family is out of town for a day or two, and I'm at the hotel."

"Don't want to miss my train," McDonough objected.

"I'll see that you don't," the stranger assured him. "I want to talk business, now you're in town."

"All right," said Big Jim, with quick decision.

It was evident that the case was one of mistaken identity. But who was his unknown friend? And who was he, himself, supposed to be. Both questions, he reflected as he accompanied the stranger, stood a very good chance of being cleared up within the next fifteen minutes. As soon as the red-haired man began to talk business of which he knew nothing, he would have to own up, treat the whole thing as a huge joke, blame his sense of humor for allowing it to go so far, and propose a small bottle to a new friendship. He could get out of it very nicely, if he didn't let the other disclose too much of his private business first.

They turned down a side street, and paused before the door of a ground-floor office which bore on its window space the sign:

The Champion Lumber Company
Limited.

"Here's where I am now," the red-haired man announced. "Better than our old quarters, eh?"

"A good deal better, I should think," concurred McDonough.

Now, "Champion" might be the name of a person, and that person, perhaps, his conductor; or it might be merely a high-sounding abstraction. Big Jim got no definite information from the sign. He entered the office with ears and eyes alert. One of the dozen or so employees busy at their desks might address his guide; and it was possible that he himself might be expected to recognize some one. But, beyond a casual glance, the busy staff paid no attention to their entrance. They passed through into an inner private office; and the stranger, pushing forward a worn leather chair for McDonough, opened his desk and produced a box of cigars.

Big Jim, who was particular about his smokes, eyed it with suspicion. To his relief, the cigar he lit was very good indeed, and he said so.

"Glad you like them," said his host, with the shadow of a grin. "Ever smoke that brand before?"

"Don't think so," replied McDonough, turning the box to view the label. "Where do you get them?"

The other chuckled. "Lordy, colonel—you are sure getting absent-minded! You sent me these yourself—half a dozen boxes. Don't you remember our election bet?"

Big Jim laughed as he affected recollection. But he realized that he had nearly made a bad break. The bet of half a dozen boxes of cigars argued some intimacy between his host and the unknown colonel. His own likeness to the latter must therefore be

extraordinary enough to deceive one who was more than a casual acquaintance.

"Well, now, this business I want to talk to you about!" began the red-haired man, after he had finished his reminiscent chuckles.

"Ah, yes—the business," returned Big Jim, with the dignity of a magnate. "What is the nature of it?"

"It's along the lines of what I wrote you just before you went away," replied the other. "You remember?"

McDonough pulled at his cigar and fixed his eyes on vacancy, after the manner of a man prepared to consider a proposition. Here was the point beyond which it would be difficult to turn back gracefully. Up to there, it was a joke. But, if he allowed the stranger to talk private business, he would have to carry through the rôle of the unknown colonel, no matter what happened. And if he were found out there would be no joke about it. Was the game worth the candle? He decided that it might be, and stood pat.

"You might just run over it again, in case I've forgotten anything," he said. "I wasn't feeling very well at the time."

"You see, it's like this," explained the other. In spite of the promising beginning, he appeared to have difficulty in arranging his thoughts, or perhaps in finding words to fit them. "As I told you, I've reached the limit of what can be done here in the lumber trade, and I want to expand; that's it—expand." He rubbed his red hair until it stood stiffly upright, and chewed his cigar vigorously for a moment. "I'll be quite frank with you, colonel. I'll put all my cards on the table, where you can see just what I hold."

Whereupon Big Jim, out of a lengthy experience of humanity, immediately came to the conclusion that the red-haired man had no intention of doing anything of the sort.

"That's right," he said encouragingly; "let me have the whole thing. I believe in frankness."

In response to this sentiment, he received a glance which he rightly interpreted to mean "Yes, you do—not!" This gave him a slight line on the character of his double, by which he determined to profit.

The red-haired man proceeded: "I know the lumber business from stump to market, and backward. I've made my knowledge pay, and I expect to make it pay better; I don't deny it. My proposition wasn't made with the idea of helping you fellows out of a hole in which you've sunk considerable money; not at all. But that, as you can see for yourself, is what it will do—or would do if your associates weren't so confounded obstinate. Now, wouldn't it?"

"Hm-m!" said Big Jim doubtfully, which he felt to be an entirely safe comment.

"You want to get out of it yourself," pursued the red-haired man persuasively, with a wave of his cigar. "There are lots better investments from your standpoint, and—excuse me, colonel—you can't afford to have good money tied up in this thing. I'm telling you that what you call your loyalty to your associates is a mistake, and it's losing money for them as well as for you. Your concern isn't expanding; it's only expending. It ain't even standing still; it's sliding backward, and every slide costs coin. So, why not meet me, sell out, stop making losses, make cash money, and let me take the chance of building up a business out of the thing?"

"Of course I'd like to see you make money," said Big Jim. "But I want to make a little myself."

The situation was as yet by no means clear. He was supposed to own something—a share or shares in a lumber business, presumably—which the other wished to buy. Incidentally, he was quite sure that the latter had reasons for the purchase which he had not disclosed.

"That's only right and reasonable," responded the red-haired man. "But there's none for you the way the business has been run in the past, and you know whether the future looks any better. I'll bet it don't. And here's another thing. The purchase price of

those timber limits you people contracted for is about due, and that's apt to give you trouble—now, ain't it?"

"Hm-m!" said Big Jim, again.

"Sure, it will," said the lumberman, with calm conviction. "And, if you want me to, I'll tell you why." As McDonough said nothing, he proceeded; "I don't say they're not worth the price, as lumber sells at present; but no bank will lend on them, just the same. Your stock isn't all issued, but you couldn't sell any more of it, if you tried. All your money is in your plant. Your issued stock is only seventy-five per cent. paid up, but if you call up the other twenty-five a lot of people can't pay; and a lot of others won't. The bank wants you to reduce your paper, even now. In fact, colonel, the concern is in pretty deep water."

"You do know considerable about us, don't you?" said Big Jim.

"You bet I do," said the lumberman confidently. "Now, if I wanted to, I could buy up every dollar of loose-held stock; I have options on most of it, or can get 'em any old time. But it ain't enough to give me control. You and Ketcheson and Swayne are the big holders. Those two would rather go broke than sell to me; and that's what they will do if they keep on, and they'll take you with them. I told you as much in my letter."

"Let's see," said Big Jim reflectively; "I answered it, didn't I? I'm apt to put off writing. And then, not feeling well——"

"Oh, yes, you answered it," replied the lumberman. "But it would take a Philadelphia lawyer to get your meaning. You never would commit yourself on paper. Don't blame you, either; it's a safe principle to go on."

Big Jim grasped the opportunity instantly. "Have you got my letter still? I'd like to see just what I did say; I haven't thought much about the matter since."

"I've got it somewhere," said the other. He rummaged in a drawer, finally turning it upside down on the desk. From the scattered contents he picked a letter which he handed to McDonough. "There it is; it'll show you mostly what you didn't say."

Big Jim, chuckling internally at the success of his strategem, took the missive. It was dated from Brownsburg; and it was addressed to Thomas Morrissey, Greenville. So the red-haired lumberman was Morrissey. The signature, after some study, he reluctantly decided might be almost anything. Duprau might decipher it, but it was beyond him; although the handwriting in the body of the letter was plain enough. But, as Morrissey had said, the contents were beautifully non-committal, proving that the writer knew a thing or two himself. So that, beyond establishing the identity of the red-haired man, and possibly the home address of the real colonel, the letter gave little information to McDonough.

"I didn't tell you much, did I?" he said, regarding Morrissey with a bland smile. "Now, let me see. I don't gather from this the exact contents of your letter. As I remember it—but I'm afraid I don't, in detail. I suppose it was copied, eh?"

"Yes, it was copied," replied Morrissey. "But I can tell you——" He broke off suddenly. "Perhaps you'd like to see the copy?"

"Oh, you can give me the gist of it, if you like," said McDonough carelessly.

"No," replied Morrissey; "I'll let you read it for yourself."

Again Big Jim chuckled internally, feeling that he had correctly gauged his man. Morrissey was himself uncertain of the exact wording of that letter, which evidently had been constructed with care, and preferred to let it speak for itself. He took his private letter book from a drawer, found the page, and held the book out to McDonough, who proceeded to engrave the letter, word for word, upon an exceedingly retentive memory.

In the first place, his identity was established; for the letter was addressed to Colonel John Y. Schumacher, at Brownsburg. It was, in effect, an offer to purchase two hundred and fifty shares of the Cognashene

Lumber Company's stock at eighty. The shares were of the par value of one hundred dollars each; but the writer stated, as he had already stated to McDonough, that only seventy-five per cent. had been called up. An acceptance of this offer, therefore, would presumably let Colonel Schumacher out with a profit, although a small one.

McDonough began to be interested. There were possibilities in the situation. Morrissey wished to buy something, and he had found out what it was. To Big Jim, whose everyday business was to sell what he did not have, this looked like an opportunity. Usually he was forced to study his man personally or by proxy, carefully devise an approach, and create circumstances to fit his game; but here was everything prepared for him, and all he needed was a little more information. He nodded at the letter book.

"Yes, I remember now," he said. "Your object is, speaking plainly, to get control of the Cognashene Company." That was obvious enough.

"Sure," answered Morrissey. "That's what I want."

"And you think my shares will give you control?" queried Big Jim. "I think you'll find that they won't."

"I know what I'm doing," said Morrissey briefly.

"That I don't dispute for a minute," returned Big Jim; "but I'd like to know how you make it out. Seems to me your calculations are apt to go astray."

"Not a bit of it," returned Morrissey. "You own two hundred and fifty shares; Ketcheson has two hundred, and Swayne the same. Outside of you three, the stock is split up small. I have or can get enough shares, with yours, to give me control. I can't deal with either Swayne or Ketcheson, and I don't want to. It's up to you, colonel, and I admit it because I can't help it."

McDonough appeared to consider the offer. In reality, he was rapidly arranging matters in his own mind, and planning a course of action. He intended to sell Morrissey those shares, or temporary substitutes therefor. The fact that he had not got them and had never seen them was a mere detail to one of his experience and handy acquaintance. He would have sold them at thirty or forty or fifty—at any old price—let alone at eighty; but it would not do to close at once. And it occurred to him that Morrissey, who evidently wanted the stock badly for reasons which he had not seen fit to disclose, might go higher.

Closing the letter book, he handed it back. Schumacher's letter to Morrissey he tossed carelessly on the littered desk; and a moment later, with equal carelessness, tossed his hat on top of it.

"Look here, Morrissey," he said, "I don't know what to say. Now, let's be frank. You say we are in a financial hole and going behind daily. For the sake of argument or the love of truth —whichever you like—I'll admit it. That being so, why do you want to buy our stock?"

"Because I think I can run the business better," returned Morrissey; but his eye did not meet McDonough's. "I'm a practical man; I'll make money where you fail."

"Sounds all right," said Big Jim. "Maybe you can, and I hope you do—if I sell. Now, tell me the real reason."

"You've got it," said Morrissey, this time meeting his questioner's eye defiantly. He chewed his cigar nervously. "I expect to make it pay; would I be trying to buy if I didn't?"

"Not unless you've changed lately," retorted Big Jim. "But when you come to me and admit that you have to have my shares to carry out your plans, I'm entitled to a peep at the ground floor. See what I mean?"

Morrissey shifted uneasily in his seat. "There isn't a thing on the ground floor, colonel."

"Then let me look at the cellar," said Big Jim, quite certain now that he was upon the right tack. "Do you take me for an infant?"

"Not at all—not at all, colonel!" said Morrissey hastily. "I'm merely convinced that I can run your business to pay, and I'm willing to put up money on it. My cards are on the table."

"Not good enough," insisted McDonough skeptically, choosing a fresh cigar. "I've seen games broken up with a cold deck before now. I don't think I care to sell, anyway."

"Now, see here, colonel," said Morrissey, "I want that business, and you know it. Does it matter why, so long as you get your price? Name a figure."

"Not in the dark," answered Big Jim. "I might make a bad guess and lose."

Morrissey regarded him with reluctant admiration.

"I'll have to come to you, I guess," he said. "Well, then, the fact is that I've got to have a larger plant to fill contracts that I've got—I mean that I can get. Your mills suit me, and your water and shipping facilities are better than I can get anywhere else. I can make a good thing out of it."

"That's better," said McDonough. "I'd like to come in."

"No!" said Morrissey emphatically. "I run my own business. I always have, and I always will. I'll buy you out because I have to, and when I get control I'll buy out the rest at my own figures, or freeze them out if they kick; but I won't go into partnership with any man. You'd want to be boss, and so would I; we'd fight inside a month."

"Something in that," McDonough agreed. "Now, look at it another way. What do you suppose Swayne and Ketcheson would think if I sold out to you?"

"They haven't got much think works, either of them," growled Morrissey savagely, his heavy jaw protruding. "They'd both sell you out if they got the chance. Let them roar. What do you care, with the cash in your pocket? They'll roar worse before I've done with them!"

Which gave Big Jim a little more light. For some immaterial reason, Morrissey hated the two men, and intended to loot the lumber company. "If I antagonize them, I ought to have something to console me," he said. "Under the circumstances, I think my shares should be worth par."

"Par!" exclaimed Morrissey. "Why, there's only seventy-five paid on them. It's over thirty per cent. on your investment!"

"Just so," said McDonough blandly; "I take that profit whenever I can get it."

"They're not worth it," Morrissey objected.

"Not to any one else, perhaps," said Big Jim. "They're worth that to me; if they're not worth it to you, we won't deal."

Morrissey shot him a glance the reverse of friendly.

"We'll deal," he announced, after a long pause. "It's a hold-up, but you've got me. Maybe I'll have something to sell *you* one of these days."

"Let me know when you have," said Big Jim, with unruffled good humor. "It's a cash deal, I suppose?"

"It's a large amount," Morrissey objected. "Say half cash, and the rest in sixty days. I'll give you my note."

"Between ourselves," Big Jim admitted confidentially, "I will require a large sum within the next couple of weeks. If you can arrange to give me cash on transfer of the shares, I won't need to bother about a mortgage I was thinking of."

"I can do it, of course," said Morrissey. "I'll have to make arrangements to finance the whole thing, anyway. When can you let me have the shares?"

Big Jim made a nice mental calculation. "I'm on my way to Chicago, now. I'll be there a week or more. Suppose I have the certificates sent to me, and drop off here with them on my way back, in a week or ten days. I'll wire you before I come."

"All right; I'll be ready for you," replied Morrissey. He pushed a pad across the desk to McDonough. "Just give me a line agreeing to sell at par."

With all his audacity, Big Jim could not undertake an offhand imitation of Colonel Schumacher's handwriting and signature. That would be sure to give him away. "It isn't necessary," he observed, with dignity. "My word is good, I suppose."

"Huh!" grunted Morrissey, in tones

which meant that he admitted nothing of the kind and was surprised that the other should assume such a thing. "Everybody's word is good, now and then; but it's easier to prove, written."

"I never write unless I have to," said McDonough, perceiving that he should not have attempted the virtuous speech. "You'll get the shares, but I don't want a paper floating around saying so."

He arose, and reached for his hat which lay on the papers on Morrissey's desk. For a moment his thumb rested on the brim, while four skillful fingers searched beneath. When he lifted the hat, Colonel Schumacher's letter to Morrissey came with it, securely tucked inside the sweat-band.

"Mr. Flinch to see you, Mr. Morrissey," said a clerk, opening the door.

"I guess you don't want to see Flinch, do you?" asked Morrissey.

Who the deuce was Flinch? And why shouldn't he see him? Big Jim wondered what new complication he would bump into. Aloud he said:

"Not particularly; no objection, though."

"Tell him to come in," said Morrissey, with a malicious grin.

Mr. Flinch came in. He appeared to bounce into the room. He was short and fat; he wore a huge, bristling mustache, and an air of being always in a hurry. When he saw McDonough, he stopped short and scowled.

"Hallo, Flinch," said Morrissey. "The colonel's back, you see."

"I see him," said Mr. Flinch, and his tone implied regret.

"Good morning, Mr. Flinch," greeted Big Jim, with an easy smile, although he scented unknown trouble. The smile appeared to exasperate the newcomer.

"Don't you good morning *me*, sir!" he spluttered. "It's like your damned impudence to speak to me at all. You're a fraud, sir, and a cheat. By Jing, now you've come back, I'll make you sweat!"

For all his nerve and savoir faire, Big Jim was taken aback. What grievance had the little man against Colonel Schumacher? Evidently he was sore as a dog about something. Morrissey's malicious grin was now plainly marked. Something had to be done at once.

"Mr. Flinch, I am not accustomed to being addressed in such language," he said, with great dignity. "Explain yourself at once, sir. You owe me an apology, which I shall see is made before we leave this room."

Flinch fairly danced with rage.

"An apology!" he cried, shaking his fist upward at Big Jim. "I'll see you in perdition first. You old skin! Sell me Bald Eagle shares, will you? I'll make you sorry for it. I was just waiting till you got back."

Again Big Jim thought rapidly. If trouble was started for Schumacher, and if Schumacher was absent in Germany or elsewhere, as seemed probable, it must be discovered that somebody had impersonated him in Greenville. That would not do. He clapped a hand on Flinch's shoulder, and, with a strength which evidently was a surprise to that gentleman, forced him into a chair.

"Sit down!" he thundered. "Sit down and talk like a man, and not like a peevish child. One more abusive word, and I'll break your neck. Now, tell me in plain English what's the matter with you!"

It was difficult to say whether Flinch or Morrissey was the more surprised at this heroic treatment. The latter's malicious grin vanished and was replaced by open-mouthed amazement. Such a course of action was no doubt not in keeping with Colonel Schumacher's character, but Big Jim could not help that.

"Now, let's hear it," he continued. "Put your trouble into civil words; I'm waiting."

"You make a great bluff, don't you!" snarled Flinch, looking apprehensive nevertheless. "Didn't you sell me ten thousand Bald Eagle shares at twenty cents, eh?"

"Well?" said McDonough.

"And didn't the mine shut down a week after?" cried the wronged Mr.

Flinch. "And didn't you give me a string of lying figures to prove it was about to pay a dividend, while all the time you knew it was worthless? Sure, you did. I've got the evidence, and now I'll sue you for fraud. I'll have a writ issued to-day. I'll make it hot for you. I'll take the first train to Brownsburg, too, and find out how many you swindled there; and we'll all sue you, if I have to pay the entire law costs myself."

This was a facer. Big Jim saw his chances of selling Cognashene shares go up in the air. If Flinch went to Brownsburg, that would settle it. He must be placated somehow. He took out his cigar case and extended it.

"Have a cigar," he said.

"You go to the devil!" snapped the little man.

Big Jim lit his cigar with deliberation, and smoked for a full minute in silence, contemplating Morrissey, who was again enjoying himself hugely.

"I suppose I couldn't convince you that I sold the stock in good faith, believing the mine to be good?" he said at length.

"You suppose dead right," retorted Flinch. "Don't try it."

"All right; I won't," said McDonough. "Now, is that all you have against me? Is that the only cause of your miserable exhibition of ill-temper and the ungentlemanly language you have seen fit to use? I am astonished and grieved that, after a long business life, I should have to meet such an accusation. And now let me ask you—did you ever complain to me before?"

"I haven't seen you since," said Flinch. "I'm making my kick now."

"Very good," said Big Jim. "In spite of the language you have used, I am disposed to consider your complaint. I am now on my way to Chicago. On my return I will go into the matter with you, and if you can show me that I misrepresented any facts whatever, I will buy back the shares at what you gave for them. Is that satisfactory?"

But, to his disappointment, Flinch did not take the suggestion. "You know what happened now as well as you will then," he said. "I'm going right ahead; I'll fix you so you won't be able to unload any more dead stocks."

There was no doubt whatever that he meant what he said. Big Jim thought hard, smoking tranquilly meanwhile, but could see only one good way out; and that was to pay Flinch then and there the amount the latter had put into Bald Eagle, namely, two thousand dollars. It was a pretty big ante, too; but then, on the other hand, the sale of two hundred and fifty Cognashene shares was a big pot. He was certain to win that, unless the real Colonel Schumacher turned up in a week; and the chance of this seemed to be remote. And Big Jim was a nervy gambler, once he sat into a game. He decided to stay.

"You're sure this stock is dead, of course," he said.

Flinch told him how dead it was, using a very forcible comparison.

"All right," said McDonough. "I happen to hold a different opinion. Produce the shares and I'll give you two thousand for them now, not because I'm afraid of any lawsuit you may bring, but because the shares themselves are worth every cent of it."

It was his last bluff, and Flinch called it with alacrity.

"I'll go and get them now, and I'll run both ways," he said. "You're a square man and a gentleman, colonel. I hope you'll overlook anything I said; I ought to have known you'd do the right thing."

When the little man had left the room, Morrissey leaned back in his chair and roared. "Bully for you, colonel!" he gasped, between paroxysms of laughter. "You carried it off well. I'll bet Flinch actually feels ashamed of himself. But he must have had you dead to rights."

"You think so, eh?" said McDonough, whose temper was not improved by the prospect of parting with two thousand dollars.

"Sure," said Morrissey. "Would you have bought back the stock if he hadn't? Not any."

"I have always taken pains to avoid the law," said Big Jim, speaking the literal truth as regarded himself; "but in this case I had another reason. Bald Eagle is going to start up again, and I can turn the stock over right now at a profit."

Morrissey whistled. "You don't say!" He regarded McDonough with reluctant admiration, mingled with doubt. On the whole, he was inclined to believe that there was some truth in the statement. Anyway, the fact remained that old Schumacher was cute as a fox.

When Flinch returned with the Bald Eagle shares, McDonough, instead of drawing a check, fished a flat package of money from an inside pocket and skinned off two thousand dollars; which payment did not seriously affect its thickness. Thus, the transaction was concluded to Flinch's entire satisfaction, if not to his own.

Then, being informed that his train was about to start, he shook hands, promised to wire Morrissey the date of his return, and set out for the station, to resume his interrupted journey to Chicago.

A cab deposited Big Jim McDonough and his worn leather grip before a very quiet hotel on the South Side. A porter relieved him of his baggage at the door. From behind the desk a long, thin man, with a drooping mustache and a pair of cold gray eyes, extended a welcoming hand which consisted of three fingers only.

"Howdy, Bud?" said Big Jim, shaking it heartily.

"Tol'ble, Jimmy," replied the other, with the faint slurring accent of the South.

Back in the seventies Bud Selby and Big Jim McDonough had played in many a high game together. A forty-five bullet which shattered Selby's dealing hand had also shattered his card luck. Now he found fairly remunerative occupation as ostensible proprietor of a hotel so quiet and little known that it had no casual business. Its guests came and went, sometimes hurriedly, but always as inconspicuously as possible. They were invariably well dressed, well behaved, and usually of retiring dispositions. And when they addressed each other it was by names other than those inscribed on the hotel register.

"The boys been waitin' fo' you," said Selby. "Frank, he's done broke again."

"Is, eh?" said McDonough, without surprise. "They got my wire?"

"I reckon," said Selby. "You'll find 'em in Forty, front."

When Big Jim entered the room he was greeted enthusiastically by Charlie Smith and Frank Duprau. Smith was as well groomed, as well set up, and his short beard was as neatly pointed as of old; he might have been taken for a member of any respectable business or profession, but never for a con man. Duprau's deceptively honest blue eyes were the same shadowless and candid orbs, and he also was well dressed; but a close observer might have detected about him an air of depression, as though he had failed in something dear to his heart.

"Jim's looking fine, isn't he, Charlie?" the latter commented. "Japan agrees with you, old scout. I wish I'd gone along when you asked me." For Frank Duprau, persistent applicant of mathematics to games from which the element of chance has been carefully eliminated by means of various ingenious devices, had broken himself entirely and completely upon the tables of Paris and Monte Carlo.

"It took him two weeks, this time, to lose his last chip," explained Charlie Smith. "He says it was just hard luck in straight games. Bless his innocent heart! Wouldn't it jar you?"

"Squeeze wheels and brace boxes, more likely," commented Big Jim.

"Not much!" said Duprau indignantly. "The layouts were straight enough. Trouble was I hadn't enough cash. With about five thousand more, I'd have broken the game. It's a mathematical certainty."

"I never saw one that wasn't a sure loser in a money game," said Big Jim. "The house is out to beat them, and it

does it every time. For a winning system, I'd rather rub a hump or pack a rabbit's foot."

"You make me tired," said Duprau. "My system is all right. Some day I'll put it across, too; and when I do I'll send the winnings home by freight. Neither of you knows a blame thing about it."

"I don't want to know," said Smith; "it's too expensive for me."

"Son," remarked Big Jim mildly, "thirty-odd years ago, when you were coupled to the milk hydrant, I was drinking red liquor and dealing games in the Southwest. The only mathematical certainty, those days, was sudden death if you made a slip. And I'd have traveled a thousand miles, horseback, then, to meet up with a sport like you, with a system and a roll back of it. I'm telling you that a quick eye and a nervous dealer, and good luck with both, may break a game; but no other combination will."

Duprau grunted his disbelief. Like many a man who makes easy money at his own crooked game, he lost it just as easily at another's; and successive costly experiences quite failed to shake his confidence that he could beat games which since their invention have flourished upon that very belief.

"You got my telegram?" said McDonough to Smith.

The latter nodded. "Yes. I've wired Jacobs to get a list of shareholders of this Cognashene Company from their last annual statement to the government. We ought to have it any mail. What have you got hold of? Not thinking of selling them any Western lands, are you?"

"Not this time," said Big Jim, with a reminiscent laugh. "I want to buy just one share of their stock." And thereupon he related briefly what had taken place in Greenville.

"It looks all right," said Charlie Smith thoughtfully, when he had concluded. "This Schumacher must be your double—or else Morrissey and Flinch were stringing you."

"No chance of it," returned McDonough. "Half a dozen people spoke or nodded to me, and one of them was the president of a local bank. Anyway, I'm in it two thousand strong now, and I'm going to play the hand out. It ought to be an easy winner." He drew a letter from his pocket. "Now, here is a whole autograph letter from Schumacher to Morrissey. With that to go on, Frank could carry on a correspondence for us if necessary."

Duprau took the letter, and glanced over it. "You're sure the signature's 'Schumacher?'" he said. "Not that it matters to me, but it might be anything else about as long."

"I saw the copy of the letter to him, to which this is the reply," said Big Jim. "John Y. Schumacher—that's the name."

Duprau drew a writing pad toward him, and began to form letters and short words with a pencil—carelessly, as it seemed. He changed and shifted the position of his elbow, wrist and pen, finally attaining a cramped writing posture which appeared to satisfy him. In five minutes he tore a slip from the paper and handed it with the letter to McDonough.

"There you are," he said. "You could get money from a paying teller on that."

Smith and McDonough compared the signatures.

"One looks about as bad as the other to me," commented Smith.

"The real one looks the worst," said Big Jim.

"That's because it's made with a pen," explained Duprau. "It's all the simpler and easier to imitate because it's pretty nearly illegible. Some people think their signatures can't be duplicated because they can't be read; as a matter of fact, they're easier to duplicate than plainly written ones, because with them a general resemblance is good enough to fool almost any one. But with a neat, legible hand each letter has to be studied, spaced and placed, and then all must be put together as rapidly as the man himself would write, in order to get even a fair imitation. There are a dozen chances of going

wrong on a plain signature, to one with the guess-my-name kind. This of Schumacher's is a cinch; and anyway, we don't have to be particular about it."

"I guess we do," said Big Jim emphatically. "I've got to deliver the shares in person, and the transfer signatures have to be right."

"You could sign the transfers yourself if you wanted to," said Duprau. "You hand them to him yourself; he looks at the back for *a* signature—not for *your* signature. Chances are even that he looks at them upside down. As long as he sees ink marks he'll be satisfied. But don't you worry. I'll fix you with signatures half a dozen experts would swear were Schumacher's, if it came to a trial."

The list of Cognashene shareholders came in that afternoon. Most of them lived in Brownsburg and its vicinity, and thither went Charlie Smith on the first train he could catch.

Brownsburg was larger than Greenville, but Smith found little difficulty in locating, with the aid of a druggist's gentlemanly assistant, most of the small holders. That was easy. But when it came to buying he discovered that Morrissey had options on most of their holdings. Those who had not given options had heard that others had done so, and were disinclined to sell, arguing that, if the stock was worth buying, it was worth keeping. They grew suspicious, backed and filled and hung fire, and all wanted time to consider.

Time was just what Charlie Smith could not afford. He had to have an original share certificate, because they could not make passable bogus ones without it; and, because of information obtained as to Colonel Schumacher's return, he had to have it at once. Swearing internally at the mulishness of human nature, he returned to his hotel, where he propped himself in a comfortable chair, lit a cigar and, taking out his list, went over it carefully.

"And it will be worse to-morrow," he thought, as his eye ran down the column of names. "Every man I've spoken to will stick a smoke in his face after supper and go and tell his neighbor that a stranger was trying to buy him out. They'll form a coöperative holding society before to-morrow morning. Guess I've made a mess of it."

By this time hs was down to the T's. "'Tucket, Minerva, Miss—Tucket, Matilda, Miss—Slowbrook—ten shares jointly,'" he read. "Tucket's a good daown-East name. They ought to sell about anything for cash, options or not. Now, where the devil is Slowbrook?"

Inquiry at the desk elicited the information that Slowbrook was ten miles from Brownsburg; further, that it was dead and buried, and its one hotel was strictly punk. No, there was no trolley line. They cut hay in the streets over there. Fishing? Not fly-fishing; suckers, maybe. Thus the smart young gentleman behind the desk. Evidently Brownsburg looked down on Slowbrook from metropolitan heights, with lofty contempt.

But after supper Charlie Smith filled his pockets with cigars and sought a livery stable, where in five minutes the shafts of a low, light, rubber-tired buckboard were drawn up to a wise, lean-headed little gray mare.

"An automobile kin pass her sometimes when it's working right," said her owner, stroking the soft muzzle affectionately. "H'lup, Pet! But you don't need to turn out for anything else coming from behind. She'll stand without tyin'; but you'd best tie her. There's a headstall in. And blanket her if she's warm. I don't often let her out to a stranger."

Pet picked her way daintily out of Brownsburg and, the open road before her, swung into a clean, graceful, unvarying gait, true and steady as a trade wind. She needed neither urging nor restraining; evidently this was her natural road gait, and Smith was entirely satisfied with it, and rather sorry when Slowbrook, lying green and peaceful in the fading light, came in view.

Assuring Pet's comfort by means of a dollar, and receiving directions in return, he turned down a quiet street, finally opening a gate from which a neatly graveled walk, bordered by neat

flower beds, led up to an equally neat brick cottage, fronted by a spacious veranda on which two neat ladies of uncertain age rocked decorously.

"Pardon me," began Smith, raising his hat. "Miss Tucket, I believe!"

"I'm Miss Tucket," replied one of the neat ladies.

Charlie Smith introduced himself. He apologized for the intrusion, but business must be his excuse. He understood that Miss Tucket and her sister owned some fifty shares of Cognashene stock. These he was prepared to buy if they would sell.

"We don't own but ten shares," said Miss Tucket. "We never did own fifty—did we, Mattie?"

"Land! I should say not," corroborated Miss Matilda. "It was all we could do to pay for ten."

"The company has never paid a dividend, I understand," said Smith.

"No; Colonel Schumacher says it hasn't been running long enough," explained Miss Tucket. "We bought the shares on his recommend, and I guess he knows. Seems like it ought to begin pretty soon."

Smith thought it would not for some time. In fact, he understood that the stock would be called up to par. And, as the ladies evidently did not understand, he explained that, seventy-five per cent. having already been paid, a call to par would mean in their case a further payment of two hundred and fifty dollars. The expression on the sisters' faces satisfied him entirely.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars more!" exclaimed Miss Tucket. "Good land o' love!"

"Deliver us!" cried Miss Matilda, in dismay. "Why, Colonel Schumacher told us, when we bought, that fifty dollars a share was all we'd ever be asked to pay."

Charlie Smith explained gently that no doubt Colonel Schumacher thought so at the time. But, as they would perceive, they had already paid seven hundred and fifty dollars, instead of five hundred only. That, he observed, with an ominous shake of the head, did not look well. These unforeseen payments were always annoying; but they had to be met promptly, or the shares would be forfeited and totally lost. A very dear aunt of his had met with serious losses in just that way. It seemed hard, but it was the law. Now, here was what he would do. If they wished to sell and avoid the necessity of making this large payment, he would give them what they had already paid for the shares, with something over—say fifty dollars—to represent interest on their investment.

The sisters exchanged doubtful glances. Their investment was not satisfactory, and they were not prepared to put any more money into it; but why should this young man wish to assume such a burden? Miss Tucket asked that question.

Charlie Smith would be frank with them. He was a broker, and a client had commanded him to buy Cognashene shares. He had advised strongly against it; but the client was obstinate. It was up to him to buy and earn his commission. That was all he had to do with it. Personally, he considered that his client was making a foolish investment; but it was his money.

He drew a package of bank bills from his pocket, and allowed them to crackle beneath his fingers. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred—so up to six hundred; the seventh hundred came in twenties, stripped away, crackling, one by one; and then ten-dollar bills—five of them. Smith watched the sisters' faces with an eye which was trained to make no mistakes.

"Seven hundred and fifty," he said. "Every cent that the shares have cost you. And now for interest! I said I would allow fifty for that. Perhaps it is too little; you have had trouble and worry. Say one hundred dollars. Eight hundred and fifty dollars, then; a clear profit of one hundred dollars. A very wise decision you have come to, ladies—very wise, indeed. Now, if you will kindly give me a receipt for the money, and the shares, if you have them—or an order, if they are deposited somewhere for safe keeping."

Almost before she knew it, Miss

Tucket's hand had closed upon more real money than she had ever held there at one time in her life. It was strange, but she could not recall having actually agreed to sell the shares. Still, she must have done so; for there was the money in her hand. She glanced at Matilda. Matilda was looking at the money. Evidently she approved.

An hour later Charlie Smith, rolling smoothly along the moonlit road toward Brownsburg, slowed the willing Pet to a walk while he lighted a fresh cigar and tapped his pocket, wherein reposed a ten-share Cognashene certificate.

"Old Schumacher ought to be ashamed of himself, roping a pair of dear old girls like them into a sawmill gamble," he soliloquized. "If we put this thing across, I'll send them back their little old shares for a Christmas present. Any way it comes out, they don't lose anything."

"And now it's a case of hustle," said Charlie Smith. "Schumacher is aboard the *Pumpernickel,* and he'll arrive inside of four days. Before that we've got to make the joint. So get a move on you, Frank."

Duprau surveyed the ten-share certificate in his hand with disgust. "Call this thing a lithograph!" he commented. "It might have been made in a job-print shop. I could turn out a better one with a pen and two kinds of ink."

"Don't care how you do it," said Big Jim. "That's your lookout. What sizes will be best, Charlie?"

"One one hundred share, two fifties, and five tens ought to be about right," replied Smith. "They'll be treasury stock, issued to Schumacher direct. You say they'll be easy to make, Frank?"

"I didn't say so," said Duprau. "It's going to be hard to turn out as bum a job and make it look like it's the best you can do. The drawing's rotten. Look at that guy with the axe, in their pretty-picture lumber scene. Does he look like a man to you?"

"Maybe he's a Swede; lots of them in the woods now," replied Smith cheerfully. "Morrissey hasn't got an eye for art, anyway, and he's your only critic. Please him, and you'll make money. Start the job as quick as you can."

Duprau, who was out of humor, stuck the certificate in his pocket and betook himself to a very private and select establishment which made a specialty of turning out on short notice copies of anything capable of being engraved or printed, exact even to the paper of the original.

When the bogus certificates were finished, they were perfect in every detail. Duprau's handy pen appended the signatures of the proper officers, as well as that of Schumacher to the transfers. And McDonough wired Morrissey that he would be in Greenville on the following day, prepared to hand over the certificates and receive payment therefor.

Everything looked rosy to Big Jim as he sat in the smoker with Duprau. So far as he could see, there wasn't a possible hitch in their well-laid plans. The certificates were in his pocket, and were perfect; Morrissey had replied to his wire; and Duprau was there to forge Schumacher's proper signature to the payment check. In a long experience McDonough could not recall anything that looked more like a lead-pipe cinch.

And so, when the train jolted itself to a halt at Greenville, late in the afternoon, he and Duprau descended the steps of the rear coach, grips in hand, with all the confidence of men who have merely to complete the formalities of a highly profitable business deal.

"Hotel first, or Morrissey?" asked Duprau.

"Morrissey," answered Big Jim. "The bank's closed for the day; but if we can catch him in his office and get the check, we can cash it first thing in the morning and pull out. If we don't get it till to-morrow, we may miss the train."

Morrissey was in his office, and he was evidently glad to see McDonough.

"Mr. Franks, of Chicago," said Big Jim, introducing Duprau. "Mr.

Franks," he explained, "is looking into a little proposition of mine. I persuaded him to drop off here with me to-night. We must go on to-morrow."

Morrissey, taking stock of Mr. Franks' beautifully honest blue eyes, wondered what sort of deadfall old Schumacher's proposition was. Although it was none of his business, he felt envious, thinking of one or two of his own which he yearned to unfold on anybody easy enough to consider them seriously. But just then he wanted to loot the Cognashene Lumber Company, and he would take a heap of satisfaction in separating Swayne and Ketcheson from their stock in that concern at a purely nominal figure, once he got control.

"You have brought the papers to close up our little matter, I suppose," said he.

"I have them already signed," said McDonough. "Also a power of attorney in blank, to make transfer of the shares on the company's books."

Morrissey looked the papers over. "All right," said he. "Your signature is not witnessed, though."

"Neither it is," admitted Big Jim. "Well, Mr. Franks saw me sign them. Anyway, I couldn't very well dispute the validity of that signature, could I?"

"I guess not," said Morrissey, glancing at the hieroglyph which served as Schumacher's sign manual. "Still, Mr. Franks had better witness it."

When Duprau had done so, Morrissey wrote a check for the amount, and handed it to McDonough. The latter drew him to one side.

"Excuse me, Morrissey, but I suppose you have arranged it so that I can obtain cash or drafts for this without delay in the morning," he said. "You see what I mean! Sometimes a big check like this means an overdraft, and there is time lost in fixing it up. I particularly want to use the money to-morrow."

"I understand," replied Morrissey. "They'll give it to you in gold, if you like. That part is all right. What are you going to do to-night? Come around to the club."

"Thanks, but I'd better go to bed," said McDonough prudently. "I'm not as young as I used to be, and I'm taking care of what I have left. And then, I want to talk to Franks."

"I see," said Morrissey, with the shadow of a wink. "Money there, colonel—what?"

But McDonough diplomatically refused to say. He and Duprau went to the hotel, where they ordered the best dinner the house could produce. They sat long over it, chatting contentedly; for their business was practically done. In the morning they would cash the check, and then the quiet places of the Continent would swallow them for a time. There was no hurry about a getaway, either. Even if Colonel Schumacher should take it into his head to come direct to Greenville after landing, they would have at least two days' start; and that, to Big Jim and Duprau, was just as good as two years.

But when they had smoked a couple of cigars the latter became restless. He walked up and down, and occasionally looked out of the window.

"Say, Jim," he said, at length, "do you suppose there's a game going on anywhere in this old town?"

"I'll bet there's twenty, if you can find them," McDonough replied. "I wouldn't try, though. The quieter we keep to-night the better."

"Well, I want something to do," said Duprau. "I think I'll just prospect a little. See you in the morning."

McDonough said no more. Left alone, he shook his head and lit a fresh cigar. After which he took Morrissey's check from his pocket and regarded it lovingly. Twenty-five thousand dollars—easy money! It was about the quickest and least troublesome piece of work he remembered. He was glad he had put up the two thousand to keep Flinch quiet; it had paid. He smiled peacefully through the blue smoke, picturing the bewilderment of Morrissey and of Colonel Schumacher when the inevitable showdown took place. And when his cigar was finished he turned in, dropping to sleep as quickly as a tired child.

Big Jim awoke suddenly, somewhere in the night, to the sound of a low, insistent knocking at his door. For the instant before he became wide awake, his hand closed on the black butt of a heavy revolver beneath his pillow. Relinquishing it, he got out of bed, switched on the light, and approached the door.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"It's me—Frank," said Duprau's voice. "Let me in, quick!"

McDonough opened the door. Duprau slid inside and closed it. He was breathing fast and heavily, and his voice, when he tried to speak, was husky and thick.

"Are you drunk, or what?" demanded McDonough severely. "If you are, get out of here and sober up in your own room!"

"Drunk nothing!" replied Duprau. "I've been hustling. Get on your clothes, quick. Hell's to pay. I'll tell you as you dress."

"You'll tell me now," said Big Jim, unmoved, sitting down. "What's stampeded you?"

For answer Duprau swore. "Get dressed, Jim, as quick as you know how! We've got to frame a getaway almighty sudden."

"Why?" insisted McDonough, without moving.

"Because," Duprau answered, "because old Schumacher—the genuine, original, labeled package—dropped dead coming down the gang plank of the steamer in New York to-day. Will that do you?"

"The devil!" exclaimed McDonough. He reached for his clothing, and began to dress. "How do you know?"

"Straight off the wire," explained Duprau. "I found my game, and she broke up about one. We came down into the bar, where a young fellow was having a high lonesome and a sandwich. He rang in on us. I forget his name; anyway, he's a reporter on their morning paper here. One of the men asked him if there was any news. 'Nothing local,' he says. 'Anything over the wire?' says the other. 'Not much,' he says. 'Old Colonel Schumacher of Brownsburg dropped dead as he landed from the *Pumpernickel* to-day. That's about all.'

"I guess I gave a jump. 'Know him?' asked the reporter. 'Slightly,' I says; 'I've seen him. Tall old guy, ain't he?' 'That's him,' he says. 'It's the only blame bit of outside news there is to-night; so it'll get the front page, and if we can fake a cut we'll do it; anything with an army mustache and gray hair goes.' And I want to tell you, Jim, I sure hit the high spots getting here."

McDonough, half dressed, swore softly to himself. "They'll go to press about three o'clock, and it's near two now," he growled. "They'll start delivery about seven, or earlier. Morrissey won't see the paper till about eight, but the hotel clerk will get a copy, maybe, before the delivery starts; or some rounder may drop in and tell him."

From his grip he produced a compact and complete railway map, and a bundle of folders. Opening the map, he ran his forefinger over it.

"Greenville—where the devil's Greenville? Oh, here! And over here is the C. B. & G., and the nearest town on it is White's Falls. Skin that bunch for a C. B. & G. time-table, Frank!"

The folders rippled under Duprau's hurrying fingers. "Here we are," he announced. "C. B. & G. Number Seventy-three, express, westbound, White's Falls, six-thirty a. m. daily. It's twenty-five or thirty miles off. Can we make it, Jim?"

"We've got to make it," replied McDonough grimly. "There's a livery just around the corner. You rustle the best team they have, and a driver who knows the road. Buy the outfit, if they kick. I'll settle up here."

"There's a garage in town," suggested Duprau.

"Not for mine," said Big Jim decisively. "You'd draw some old car that would break down in ten miles. Get harness horses, and do it quick!"

Five minutes later he was paying their bills, explaining meanwhile that he was summoned suddenly to the

deathbed of an old schoolmate in the country. His friend, Dr. Franks, might be of service, and was going too. They would return that day, if possible. Mail for either was to be held.

At the livery he found Duprau in hot argument with a sleepy and reluctant proprietor.

"Won't morning do?" said the latter. "I ain't got a driver here."

"Drive yourself," Big Jim cut in. "This is a case. You're in business for the coin, aren't you? How much do you want?"

"For night work, team and driver, I get two dollars an hour, colonel," lied the proprietor, who recognized him. "But——"

Big Jim flashed a fifty-dollar bill before his sleepy eyes, and placed it in his hand. "Get hooked up!" he commanded. "The best team in the stable —see!"

The sleepy proprietor woke up suddenly and capitulated. "All right," he said briefly. He disappeared between the rows of stalls, and they heard his "Over, Mike—stan' roun', Pete!" as he harnessed. He led out two wiry, slashing chestnuts, who laid back their ears and bit at each other as they were backed to a light road wagon.

"Now, gents, where do you want to go?" he asked, as he reined back the rearing team for an instant in the stable yard.

"White's Falls," replied McDonough.

"That's thirty miles!" said the liveryman doubtfully.

"What of it?" demanded McDonough. "If it was thirty yards I'd walk. Do you keep your horses for pets, or just to look at?" His irritation found vent in words which were evidently an entire surprise to the liveryman. "You get us into White's Falls not later than six, and I'll hand you another fifty. What do you want, anyway? That ought to suit you down to the ground!"

"Sure, it does, colonel," said the liveryman, with a respect inspired by his patron's command of language as much as by the money. "G'lang, boys! Sit tight, gents; they're some lively at the start."

They rolled into White's Falls shortly after six o'clock, and drew up before the station.

"Here's the other fifty," said McDonough. "And look here—I've paid you pretty well, eh?"

"I got no kick comin', colonel!" The liveryman grinned.

"You bet you haven't," said McDonough. "I'll have more work for you next time I'm in town. But if any one should ask you when you get back, you don't know anything about this trip—understand! That is, you don't go telling any one you drove me and my friend over here."

"Sure, I won't," replied the man. "That's all right, colonel. I'll keep it dark!"

And so, while Morrissey read the account of Colonel Schumacher's sudden taking-off in utter bewilderment, and swore excitedly, and got the cashier of the bank on the phone and stopped payment of his check, and wondered where on earth he was at, Big Jim McDonough and Frank Duprau were whirling westward at fifty miles an hour, including stops. Both were sleepy, tired and infinitely disgusted; and their conversation was monosyllabic and profane.

"Nice finish!" growled Duprau. "Of all the rotten luck! Wouldn't it jar you?"

"Just about four thousand dollars worth," said Big Jim shortly, for he was not pleased. "We're out that much. And the blasted story will get on the wires and be printed from one end of the country to the other. 'The Greenville Ghost!' That's what they'll call it; and every paper will have a cut of Schumacher. They'll be bad ones, but it's a case of lie low for me for months, all the same."

He took Morrissey's check from his pocket, and regarded it with disgust. "No good now," he said. "What's the use of packing it about?"

A moment later it fell in fluttering fragments from the car window.

The Borghese Emerald

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "The Mafia and the Contessa," "The Archduke and the Dachshund," Etc.

A STORY OF THE ITALIAN CAMORRA

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

In a Neapolitan junk shop, Tommy Williams and his friend, who tells the story, discover a number of cameos which the artist-detective recognizes as belonging to the famous Farnsworth collection, recently looted in Baltimore. The junk dealer, Ragoni, professes ignorance of the affair, but is intimidated when Tommy draws, in the dust on a table, the Camorra sign of the "Hat." Later he sends the jewels to Tommy's studio, with a pitiful note, saying that he is willing to give them up if no action is taken against him. Tommy learns from a newspaper that Ragoni was killed while attempting to board an outward-bound vessel. The gem of the whole collection, the Borghese emerald, is missing; Tommy enters into an agreement with the Marchese Vespoli, chief of the Camorra, to find it. Vespoli tells him that he may learn something about the jewel from Beatrice Ancina, the great actress, whose passion for gems is well known. Inspector Clancy, of the New York force, comes to Naples with instructions from Longley, the district attorney, to enlist the aid of Tommy Williams in finding the murderer of Jenkins, the watchman who was killed by the thieves when the jewels were stolen. Tommy and his friend visit "la bella Bice," as Beatrice Ancina is called, at Posilippo. The next day she comes to the studio, where Williams learns that she has bought protection from one Salvatore Trama, a deputy of the Camorra, and that she, having refused to marry Farnsworth as the price for her obtaining possession of the emerald, has lately received it in a package. Farnsworth, who had pledged the collection to the Van Toller Trust Company, turns up in Naples; and Clancy tells Tommy that he is the man he is after, on the strength of circumstantial evidence which proves that Farnsworth had gone to Baltimore from New York and entered the house on the night of the murder.

VII.

THE case which had been built up against young Farnsworth seemed to me sufficiently convincing to warrant Clancy's confidence of conviction; but Tommy shrugged his shoulders impatiently when I ventured to state my opinion in words.

"Clancy really did extremely good routine police work in his investigations, and it is not without value; but it's a safe wager that it will never hang Farnsworth," he said. "It's just the same old story; the assumption of Farnsworth's guilt does not violate the unities of time or place. It was possible for him to have visited Baltimore during the time of his unexplained absence from the hotel. Of course, there was a plausible motive for his commission of the crime. That is sufficient for Clancy, and I'll wager that, in his efforts to find proof against the man he suspects, he overlooked a dozen circumstances which would have pointed in another direction. I am willing to go part of the way with him and grant the possibility of Farnsworth's guilt; but it will take more than he has discovered in the way of evidence to make it a certainty."

"But the evidence he collected is a far greater justification for his suspicions than your deductions were for your discourtesy to Beatrice Ancina," I retorted, the memory of his curtness still rankling in my mind.

Tommy's answering grin was aggravating.

"My dear fellow, 'la bella Bice' is, by her own confession, implicated in this matter—innocently, as she claims;

guiltily, as Clancy asserts; and his case against her is quite as strong as his case against Farnsworth. You are ready to accept his evidence against the one—why not against the other?"

"I might put the same question to you. Why do you champion the cause of young Farnsworth, who deliberately avoids you to prevent explanations, and treat the woman who comes to you voluntarily as if she were guilty?"

Tommy laughed as he locked the cameos in a drawer of his desk. "I believe in her innocence as thoroughly as you do; but I don't want her to know it—yet," he admitted. "You have before you all the elements of the hackneyed detective romance. We know that a beautiful woman was covetous of a certain rare gem. Farnsworth, because he loved her, would have given it to her; but his own extravagance had placed it beyond his power to do so honestly. Vespoli, whom we know to be absolutely without scruple, also wished to gain possession of it. This much we know from their own admissions. There is more or less of a case against each one of them. To my mind, the evidence points most conclusively to Beatrice Ancina; for she has had the gem in her possession, and her story of its receipt is quite as unconvincing as her account of its disappearance.

"To bring your romance to a fitting conclusion, it is only necessary to forge, link by link, the chain of evidence against her, until it seems absolutely perfect; and then to have Inspector Clancy unexpectedly take the centre of the stage and snap the handcuffs on the wrists of a third assistant deputy housemaid, whose previous appearance in the case has consisted in dusting the furniture. The gem is produced from her back hair—it isn't necessary to give a plausible explanation of how it came there—and the persecuted heroine stands vindicated with the spotlight full on her beautiful upturned face. You can fill in the necessary details to suit yourself."

"If I ever write it, I shall have to change the ending," I said irritably. "It will be T. Williams who occupies the centre of the stage at the climax."

"Then it's time that we went in search of the housemaid, and we'll commence by looking up Vespoli," he answered, laughing.

When we found Vespoli, Tommy wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Vespoli, I have heard the story of the gallant behavior of one Salvatore Trama from Beatrice Ancina," he said. "If she suspected your identity under that disguise, she was loyal enough to keep her suspicions to herself."

"She had none," replied Vespoli, smiling. "It would be easier to fool her than it would be to impose upon you, Mr. Williams. The type is so well known to her that she would accept it without too close scrutiny. I had reasons of my own for not wishing to guarantee her safety as the Marchese Vespoli."

"Such a guarantee would of necessity have been more binding," suggested Tommy.

Vespoli's dark face flushed angrily. "The pledge of Salvatore Trama was absolutely sacred!" he protested vehemently. "It was not——"

"Effective," interposed Tommy banteringly. For an instant I thought that the Italian would strike him; but he was shrewd enough to realize that Tommy was willfully aggravating him, and he remained silent until he was master of his temper.

"As you say, it was not entirely effective; for the Borghese emerald was taken from her house, in spite of his pledged protection," he answered finally. "There is no use in our attempting to solve the mystery of that disappearance together unless you accept the assurance that I was not concerned in it, Mr. Williams. There is one thing of which you may be sure; we never break a pledge, any more than we forgive treachery. It will never be necessary to invoke the aid of the law if the perpetrators of that theft are discovered."

Tommy watched his face attentively while he spoke. "I am inclined to credit

both of your statements, Vespoli," he answered. "Unfortunately, the law, as represented by Inspector Clancy, is already interested in it. It may be difficult to convince him that the gem really disappeared; that it is not still in the possession of Beatrice Ancina. If you will dine with us, it will perhaps make it easier to convince him of that; for you can give him an insight into the life of the underworld of Naples. If you do, it will, at least, make it very much easier for 'la bella Bice.'"

Vespoli hesitated for a moment. "This will not imply that I am to betray Farnsworth into his hands?" he asked.

Tommy shook his head. "I assume that he has gone into hiding?" he said interrogatively.

Vespoli nodded. "He is at least living in retirement at the moment," he said, with a significant smile. "It is much easier to keep out of prison than to get out after one is once arrested in Italy. I doubt if your friend Inspector Clancy could locate him in a month of Sundays."

Tommy's long fingers drummed a soft tattoo on the table top, and his eyes wandered aimlessly from face to face of the other occupants of the café.

"Vespoli, I believe that I could put my finger on him in short order if I wished to; but I don't need him yet," he said confidently. "I tell you frankly that Clancy has sufficient evidence against him to make it very unpleasant for him; but it is of little consequence to me what happens to Mr. Farnsworth. On the other hand, I am very much interested in preserving the Borghese emerald. I believe that you are, too; and, while our motives may be different, there is no reason why we should not work in harmony to the same end. We may disagree about the disposition of the gem if we recover it; but we won't cross that bridge until we come——"

"That bridge need never be crossed," interrupted Vespoli savagely. "If I could have come by that intaglio earlier, it would have been of inestimable value to me; but now you are entirely welcome to it. All that I ask is the knowledge of the identity of the thieves."

"A matter of discipline?" suggested Tommy.

"Perhaps a matter of self-preservation," admitted Vespoli frankly. "Mr. Williams, Ragoni was not killed by the police. When his companions discovered that his capture was probable, he was shot by some one in his own boat; the bullet which killed him was fired from a Custer revolver."

Tommy took the newspaper clipping from his pocket, and read aloud the account of Ragoni's death.

"Vespoli, who were the men in the police launch?" he asked suspiciously.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders. "They were the harbor police; but your deduction is correct, Mr. Williams," he answered. "If Ragoni had been taken alive, I should have been given an opportunity to question him."

"And, knowing that, his confederates killed him to prevent discovery of their own identity?"

"Exactly; just as they would kill me at the first opportunity, if I did not adopt proper precautions," replied Vespoli; and again Tommy scanned the faces of the other guests. The Italian nodded when he turned to him inquiringly.

"Several of them are friends of mine—a bodyguard, as a matter of fact," he continued. "You have also been provided with one for the past twenty-four hours, and the protection has been effective, or you would not be here."

Tommy smiled incredulously, and motioned to him to follow us to the street.

"I am under the wing of the Camorra, then?" he said, as we walked toward Clancy's hotel; and, in spite of the mockery in his voice, I saw that he watched alertly for signs of friends or foes.

"Mr. Williams, until you interested yourself in the affairs of a certain group of people in Naples, the guarantee of one man for your safety would have been sufficient," replied Vespoli slowly.

"Also, a single word from that one man would have insured your immediate destruction. Perhaps it is only coincidence; but since you have been here the absolute power of that man, arising largely from the immunity which his subordinates had enjoyed under his leadership, has been impaired. Confidence has been lost, because many of those subordinates have fallen into the hands of the law. Just the same, it would not suit the plans of that man to have you eliminated before you have repaired in a measure the injury you have done. By a fortuitous chance, the quest of the Borghese emerald will enable you to do that, and at the same time serve your own ends."

Tommy stopped short, and gave a whistle of astonishment. "In other words, you are counting upon me to restore the confidence of your subordinates and enable you to retain the leadership of a united and obedient Camorra!"

Vespoli made an elaborate bow of acknowledgment. "Which you will do if you solve the mystery of the disappearance of the gem," he said quietly. "That is why I am your ally in the matter, and quite ready to render you and Inspector Clancy every assistance in my power."

For a moment Tommy paused irresolutely; then, with a laugh, he extended his hand to Vespoli.

"I admire your frankness, and I'll take you at your word," he said. "Mind you, I am to be free to work in my own way; but my object is the recovery of the Borghese emerald. If it incidentally leads to the administration of discipline to some of your friends, it is not my affair. You have no objection to my being perfectly frank with Clancy?"

"Not the slightest—we must all be frank with each other, if we are to accomplish anything," answered Vespoli, as he took the extended hand.

Still smiling at the queer turn which had brought about such an unexpected alliance, Tommy led the way into the Vermouth di Torino, where Clancy was impatiently awaiting us.

VIII.

The contrast between Clancy and the Marchese Vespoli was so great that it made our meal an interesting one, and I watched them as they studied each other carefully. The real matter in hand was not touched upon; but Vespoli talked interestingly of Neapolitan life and customs, and the inspector was shrewd enough to read between the words the real meaning of many of his stories, which revealed the close alliance between the municipal police and the organization of criminals of which he was the head.

"Sure, these dagoes c'u'd send Tammany Hall to night school!" admitted Clancy to me admiringly, as we followed Vespoli and Tommy along the narrow sidewalk, on our way back to the studio. "Bechune friends, I'm not denyin' that a stray ten-spot is sometimes slipped into th' fist of a pathrolman in little old New York to make him wink th' other eye; but even in th' palmy days before Barker butted in th' graft was never this good. It's meself that'll shake down every Eyetalian member of th' force when I get back, to see how much Black Hand money they've got in their kicks. It'd never do to let—— Hully gee, look at that, now!"

His interruption was as startling as the action which had caused it, and his own action as quick as his words.

A cab had drawn up to the curb ahead of us, and from it stepped a man directly behind Vespoli. I saw his hand raised; then another man, who seemed to have appeared from the pavement, struck at him. A long knife clattered to the sidewalk; but even before Vespoli had turned Clancy had pinned the arms of his rescuer from behind, and they rolled on the pavement together, as the would-be assassin jumped back into the cab and was whirled away.

A dozen hasty words of explanation, and then Tommy put his hand on Clancy's shoulder. The inspector had his prisoner underneath, and one wrist was already imprisoned with a band of steel.

"Clancy, I warned you that you would make a fool of yourself if you acted without advice!" exclaimed Tommy angrily. "You have got the wrong man and let the right one escape. This is a friend of——"

"Sure, this isn't a matter of friendship, Mr. Williams," interrupted Clancy, as he drew back the prisoner's free arm and snapped the handcuff on the wrist with a dexterity which told of much practice. "'Tis not meself as w'u'd be after interferin' with th' little private scraps in furrin parts; but when I see th' man I'm wantin' I take him. Get up, Farnsworth, an' be good!"

Vespoli attempted to interpose; but a crowd was gathering, and, motioning to him to be silent, Tommy caught Farnsworth by the arm and shoved him toward a cab.

"Come to the studio!" he said quickly; and, leaving Vespoli and myself to follow, he drove away with Clancy and his prisoner. Farnsworth, still handcuffed, was seated there when we arrived, guarded by Clancy, whose expression under Tommy's amused scrutiny was a curious mixture of triumph and defiance.

"Who was it, Farnsworth?" asked Vespoli curtly, in Italian.

The prisoner shook his head, and Clancy made immediate protest.

"None of that, now, sir!" he exclaimed. "Only United States goes here. Don't youse open your head in Eyetalian, or it's youse for th' jug."

"Shut up, Clancy, and take those handcuffs off!" interposed Tommy quickly. "You can lock your man up if you want to; but I'll guarantee that you'll never get him extradited." Clancy obeyed, but with evident reluctance; and, after freeing his prisoner's wrists, he stood behind his chair.

"Now, Vespoli, we have another very significant item of evidence," continued Tommy. "If Clancy hadn't been quite so impetuous, I reckon we should have had the explanation of the whole thing; for Farnsworth would have held the man who tried to do you. But I take it that he didn't even recognize him. Am I right in that, Mr. Farnsworth?"

Farnsworth looked inquiringly at Vespoli, and then turned to Clancy. "I seem to have butted into enough trouble already, and I'm not saying a word until I know where I stand," he replied sullenly. "Am I under arrest?"

"Sure, you're pinched; but youse can make a statement," answered Clancy.

Farnsworth shook his head, and remained silent.

"Mr. Farnsworth, that statement isn't entirely correct," said Tommy quietly. "Technically, you are not under arrest; for Inspector Clancy has no authority here. The Italian police would, of course, arrest you on his request; but I trust that will not be necessary. I'll give you a piece of advice; if you are perfectly frank with us, you will probably be spared a lot of trouble and notoriety. Inspector Clancy intends to charge you with the murder of your watchman and the theft of a part of the collection which you had hypothecated to the Van Toller Trust Company. If you can explain away the suspicious circumstances which point to your guilt, I am sure that he will never ask for your arrest and extradition."

Again Farnsworth looked inquiringly at Vespoli; but the marchese was intent upon the lighting of a cigarette, and their eyes did not meet.

"It seems to me that such a suspicion is so absurd on the face of it that it hardly requires an answer," said Farnsworth, after a moment's hesitation. "The slightest investigation would have convinced him that I was in New York at the time of the commission of the crime in Baltimore."

Tommy nodded, and stopped to light a cigarette, while a complacent grin appeared on Clancy's face behind his prisoner's chair.

"Exactly; that is just what investigation did show," assented Tommy. "I might use your own words, 'the slightest investigation.' Unfortunately for your contention, however, a more thorough investigation yielded entirely dif-

ferent results. I do not assert that you are guilty of those crimes, Mr. Farnsworth; but I know that you may be."

The young fellow's face went white, and fear came to his eyes, in spite of his assumption of bravado. "I am not guilty, Mr. Williams!" he protested. "I don't care what your suspicions may be. I have made a mess of my life, and I have been a fool; but I am neither a robber nor a murderer."

"But, unless you can demonstrate your innocence here, you will probably be called upon to do it before a jury in Baltimore," answered Tommy sharply. "See here, Farnsworth; they have dug up enough evidence to hang you. You were not in New York when the crimes were committed, and you were in Baltimore and in your own house that night. I'll give you my theory of it, and I hope it will lead you to be frank with us. I believe you learned that the robbery was planned, and went to Baltimore to prevent it. You arrived too late, and, knowing that suspicion would be strong against you, you fled back to New York, instead of giving the alarm. Having made one mistake, you followed it with others, and tried to perfect your alibi. Then, being half Italian, you sought the aid and protection of an influence which you knew to be stronger than the law in this country, when you found that the proceeds of the theft had been brought here. I don't know that I blame you for that last step; for I know your friend Vespoli fairly well, and——"

Even Clancy's vigilance was for the moment ineffectual; for, as Tommy spoke, Farnsworth had quietly prepared himself, and with one desperate spring he landed on the marchese. They went to the floor together, greatly to the detriment of the studio furniture. The effectual way in which Farnsworth massaged the frame of the Italian with his knees, while his hands choked his throat, suggested that he was acquainted with Bowery rough-house tactics; but Clancy, too, was an expert; and the American was as limp as his victim when he was dragged off and thrown back into his chair.

There was plenty of the fighting spirit left, however; and, while Tommy and I helped the demoralized marchese to his feet, Farnsworth swore at him for a treacherous dog, and cursed the impulse which had prompted him to save his life at the expense of another's liberty.

"The meeting now being restored to order, we shall proceed with the business before it," interrupted Tommy sharply. "I'll let Clancy iron you again if you don't keep quiet, and gag you to boot, unless you stop your noise, Farnsworth. This little eruption of yours has shown me that my theory is fairly correct; but, in justice to the man whom you tried to do up, I must tell you that he has not betrayed you. It isn't from him that I have received the information on which my theory was based; but a large part of it came from the woman who furnished the motive of the crime, and her name is——"

"Stop!" shouted Farnsworth, and only Clancy's firm grip on his collar prevented him from struggling to his feet. "There is no use in dragging innocent people into this. I lied to you; I did go to Baltimore that night, and I am guilty of both the theft and the murder!"

Clancy could not restrain an exclamation of triumph, and the handcuffs flashed in the electric light as he whipped them from his pocket.

But Tommy shook his head, and motioned to the detective to keep quiet.

"Farnsworth, you are trying to make the worst kind of a mess of this, and you are a mighty poor liar," he said quietly. "Your first prevarication was not convincing, and this absurd confession is even less so. I know the motive which prompted it; but all the confessions you could make in a month would not prevent the name of Beatrice Ancina from being mixed up in the affair. She has confessed to me that she received the most valuable part of the plunder—the only article which is still missing; for I have the other cameos here. We have only her assertion that the stone was stolen from her, to account for its disappearance.

Now, if you tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth, we may be able to patch all of our information together and clear her from very grave suspicion; but you can't do it by fake confessions."

Vespoli had pulled himself together while Tommy was speaking, and, without the slightest evidence of resentment for his rough handling, he seconded Tommy's advice.

"I can assure you that 'la bella Bice' is quite able to take care of herself," he concluded. "If not, there are those who are wholly of her blood, who will see that no injustice is done to her." There was just a little suggestion of malice in his remark, which brought a flush to Farnsworth's pale face.

"I reckon that you'll have enough to do to take care of your own skin, which would have been neatly punctured to-night if I hadn't interfered," retorted the prisoner. "Williams, you can take my confession for what it is worth. It goes as it stands, and I haven't anything more to say. I'm ready to go back without extradition, and take what is coming to me without a whimper."

Tommy shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Then, of course, *I* have nothing more to say," he answered, and deliberately turned his back upon Farnsworth and faced the marchese. "Vespoli, this young man has eliminated himself; so it's up to us to look out for your fair countrywoman. Of course, Clancy will demand her arrest as an accessory and accomplice, and put Farnsworth in jail while he fights for extradition. It may be a matter of months——"

"Hold on, Williams!" shouted Farnsworth, who had arisen meekly enough at a sign from Clancy. "I suppose you know all about the man with whom you are proposing to work?"

"I believe I know all that you could tell me, at least," replied Tommy. "That is, all except your connection with him."

Farnsworth made a gesture of surrender, and sat down. "I can tell you that in very few words," he said.

"It is the relationship of the gull with the sharper—of the tool with the hand which directs it. I shall probably be hanged for the murder of poor Jenkins; but there is the man whose hand set in motion all the machinery which wove the plot. I wish you joy of your companionship."

Tommy turned to Vespoli again, and I expected to hear a vehement denial; but the Italian leisurely selected and lighted a fresh cigarette before speaking.

"Your impetuous young countryman is entirely correct in his assertion," he acknowledged calmly. "It was I who originated the idea of gaining possession of the Borghese emerald; but unfortunately my plan was not successful. If it had been, there would have been none of this trouble; the Neapolitan prisons would not be so overcrowded; and you, Mr. Williams, would have ceased to bother about things which do not concern you—or anything else. Some one else succeeded where I failed, however; and, while I do not believe the confession of Farnsworth, I suppose that it will lead to his execution. The identity of the real perpetrators of the theft is unknown to me; but I fancy that, if they are ever discovered, they will prove to be acquaintances, and the same people who have tried to kill me three times within the past three days."

"And possibly the same men who shot Ragoni to prevent him from betraying that identity!" suggested Tommy eagerly.

"Our deductions lead us to the same conclusions, Mr. Williams, and that may suggest to you why I selected as my most trustworthy bodyguard a man who was half American by blood," replied Vespoli, glancing significantly at Farnsworth.

Tommy's eyes twinkled as he looked from one to the other. "Now, gentlemen all, we shall proceed to put our picture puzzle together; for I begin to see a great white light," he said. "As a first step, the Marchese Vespoli will tell us just how he had planned to get possession of the Borghese emerald, to

bribe Beatrice Ancina into becoming a guardian angel of the Camorra."

Farnsworth uttered an oath, and Vespoli started forward in his chair. After one glance at Tommy, he settled back again and, with a typically Neapolitan gesture, signified his willingness to tell his story.

IX.

"There was absolutely nothing personal in my desire to obtain possession of the Borghese emerald; for I have none of the collector's passion in my make-up," commenced Vespoli, after Tommy had cautioned Farnsworth not to interrupt him. "I have, however, seen enough of that passion in others to recognize how powerful it is; and one of its worst victims is a woman who has few weaknesses—Beatrice Ancina.

"There is nothing to be gained by mincing matters," he continued, with an apprehensive glance at Farnsworth, who had started forward at the mention of her name. "I know 'la bella Bice' better than any of you, and, while I have never been one of her sentimental victims, she has always been a fascinating study to me. I have always realized the tremendous power which her attraction for men gives to her—a power which is universal so long as she distinguishes no one man with her favors. I have often speculated upon what an influence she might be for evil if she were an unscrupulous woman, and the possibilities are boundless.

"On the other hand, I appreciated how helpful she might be to an ambitious man if her influence could be obtained without the sacrifice of her freedom. In furthering my own ambitions, I have never needed such assistance; so it did not occur to me to make a personal application of my speculations, until the necessity was thrust upon me and I realized that I might be called upon to make a fight, not only for power, but for very existence." He paused, and looked significantly at Tommy.

"How long ago was that?" asked my friend.

"It became apparent to me when I found that I was unable to guarantee immunity or inflict discipline, and the time coincides closely with your appearance on the scene," admitted Vespoli frankly. "I realized that I should need every powerful ally whom I could enlist, and I planned to put myself in a position to appeal to her. I knew better than any one else her love for emeralds and her mania for collecting rare intaglios—a passion which would lead her to sacrifice the fruits of months of hard work for the possession of a gem she coveted. I have seen the collector's mania lead to all sorts of strange actions, gentlemen; to theft on the part of millionaires, to actual collusion in crimes of violence by timid women. I knew Beatrice well enough to believe that it offered the one chance to bribe her; that, if I could make the bait sufficiently tempting, she would swallow it, and her great influence would be absolutely at my disposition."

In spite of the warnings he had received, an imprecation came from Farnsworth's lips; but Tommy quieted him with an impatient gesture, without removing his eyes from the Italian's face.

"Vespoli, how does Beatrice Ancina come by that mania?" he asked. "Is it hereditary?"

The marchese's eyes met his in one quick questioning glance, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he said indifferently. "I accept things as I find them, and the fact that she is afflicted with it was sufficient. Granting that, it was only necessary to find the gem which would offer sufficient temptation, and I believed that there was only one in existence which would answer. That was the Borghese emerald. Therefore, I formulated a plan to gain possession of it—a plan which would have been successful if I had not been betrayed."

We all looked at him expectantly when he paused and drew from his pocket a small velvet-covered case. He

handed it to Tommy, who opened it and, in his astonishment, allowed its contents to drop to the table. Farnsworth, too, cried out; for glittering in the light of the electric reading lamp lay a great emerald, on its face a wonderful deep cutting of the "Judgment of Paris."

Even Clancy relaxed his vigilance sufficiently to let his prisoner arise from his chair, and joined him at the table, where we eagerly examined the gem. Tommy held it up to the light, looked at it in reflection, and studied it carefully with a powerful glass before handing it to Farnsworth and turning to Vespoli.

"I'm free to confess that I am not sufficiently expert to venture an opinion; but I judge from what you have said that it is an imitation," he said.

Farnsworth uttered an exclamation of protest when the marchese nodded assent.

"Impossible—that is the Borghese emerald itself!" he exclaimed. "That man is lying, Williams; he stole it from Beatrice Ancina!"

Vespoli's face flushed, and a glow of anger came to his dark eyes. "You did not inherit the unfailing judgment of your father in the matter of genuineness," he retorted. "It was knowledge of that which would have made my plan successful; for you would never have detected the substitution. Mr. Williams, that is only a remarkably perfect copy of the Borghese jewel, cut in a reconstructed emerald by the cleverest modern intaglio artist. It cost a great deal of money; but, of course, its value is a mere bagatelle when compared to the value of the original. It would not pass the scrutiny of experts; Beatrice Ancina, for example, would discover the imitation immediately; but, if my plan had been successful, it would probably have passed as the original to the purchaser at the dispersal sale of the Farnsworth collection. Poorer forgeries are the treasured possessions of many of your American collectors."

"Your plan was to substitute this for the original?" said Tommy interrogatively, and when Vespoli nodded he glanced questioningly at Farnsworth. "Did your plan imply collusion on his part?" he asked.

"Perhaps, if such collusion had been necessary; but I believe that I could have managed without it, and it is never wise to have unnecessary confederates," confessed Vespoli, in the most matter-of-fact tone. "His infatuation for Beatrice Ancina would have insured his complaisance. Unfortunately, before I had an opportunity to make the substitution, the unknown bunglers stepped in, and the publicity which followed their clumsy robbery has made the stone valueless to me."

"But that robbery and the subsequent developments here in Naples have made it absolutely necessary for you to discover the identity of the robbers," said Tommy.

Again Vespoli inclined his head. "For the identity of the actual thieves I care little," he said. "As you suggest, however, it is absolutely necessary for me to discover the person who planned the robbery."

Clancy had listened impatiently to the explanation, which was practically as unintelligible to him as though we had talked in Greek, and he placed his hand authoritatively on Farnsworth's shoulder.

"Mr. Williams, what's th' use of chewin' th' rag about this job?" he protested. "This guy knows that we've got him dead to rights, an' he's not makin' a holler. He's th' man I came for; when I get him an' put it up to him, he squeals without th' third degree, an' I'm goin' to jug him."

Greatly to my surprise, Tommy made no objection to the inspector's plan, and, without answering him, turned to Farnsworth.

"You have not changed your mind?" he asked. "You must realize that Clancy is entirely within his rights if you stick to your confession."

Farnsworth shook the inspector's hand from his shoulder. "I'll take advantage of your tip, Williams," he replied. "I am not under arrest now; but I know that it is in his power to

have the Italian police lock me up. If they do, and I fight extradition, it will be a matter of months; but I shall be kept in solitary confinement during that time.

"I'm willing to make a bargain. I will submit to nominal arrest in the custody of Clancy; but I don't want to be taken back immediately. If he will agree to remain here for a week and allow me as much liberty as is consistent with my safe custody, I promise to return to America with him at the end of that time without the delay of extradition proceedings. If he does not, I'll put up the hardest fight I can to prevent extradition."

Clancy's expression was eloquent of disappointment; but Tommy spoke before he could utter his objections.

"Clancy, I will make myself personally responsible for this man's good behavior," he said quickly. "Take him with you; don't let him out of your sight, and, in a week, if you still want him, he will accompany you back to New York."

Clancy started a vehement protest; but Tommy cut him short.

"I offer you another alternative!" he said. "You have no more authority to make an arrest here than I have. We are three to one, and if you don't agree to that proposition I tell you very frankly that Farnsworth will be given sufficient start in leaving this studio to enable him to disappear in the crowd."

Clancy was evidently hardly able to credit his hearing; but one glance at Tommy's face convinced him that he was helpless.

"Youse wins," he said sullenly. "I'll take him away now, an' I'll treat him fair; but that's not sayin' that he won't get all that's comin' to him if he tries to make a getaway."

"That's a fair bargain," said Tommy good-naturedly. "Farnsworth, if you feel tempted to give him the slip, just remember that I'm on your bond, for one thing, and that Clancy will break you in two, for another." He held out his hand as he spoke.

Although Farnsworth was evidently disappointed that he was to be taken away, the firm hold which Clancy had taken of his arm reminded him that his own proposal had been accepted; and, with a curt adieu which ignored Vespoli, he left the studio, virtually a prisoner.

Tommy carefully locked the door after them, and then turned to the marchese.

"Now, Vespoli, you can talk more freely than you were willing to in the presence of Clancy and Farnsworth," he said. "First, tell us which of your intimate friends you suspect of forestalling you in getting the emerald, of killing Ragoni and attempting to put you out of the way."

"And after that?"

"After that you can explain the development of the collector's mania in Beatrice Ancina, and the reason for your belief that she would willingly have received property which she knew to have been stolen," answered Tommy grimly.

Vespoli's face was as impassive as a mask. "We had better go back to the original question; but it is one which I can hardly answer," he said. "Two of my associates knew of my plan to get the emerald, and that plan necessarily took considerable time to prepare, as it was necessary to have the substitute made. The subsequent developments would indicate that one of them attempted to forestall me and gain for himself the influence which I had hoped to get for the unfortunate members of the society who stand in grave danger. I had suspected it before; but your discovery of the cameos in Ragoni's shop clinched my suspicions. Members of the Camorra were involved in that robbery and murder, Mr. Williams; but it was not a Camorra affair."

"It was sadly bungled; so I believe you," answered Tommy. "It has the earmarks of such a conspiracy as you yourself laid to dispose of Doctor Michio, so that you might step into his shoes as the head of the society."

"And there is much truth in the old saying that 'Nothing succeeds like success,'" quoted Vespoli, with cynical

frankness. "Michio made a stupid mistake, Mr. Williams; he advanced to power a man cleverer than himself. In my comparatively short leadership I have endeavored to profit by that mistake; and, without violating the traditions of the society, which make it necessary for its leader to consult its council in all grave affairs, I have selected for the members of that council men from whom I had nothing to fear in a contest of wits. The event proves that my selections were wise ones; but I have to run the risk of brute violence instead of skillful headwork. One or both of the men who knew of the plan have betrayed me, and at a nod from me they would pay the forfeit; but I want to know every man who worked with them.

"It resolves itself into a question of time; I must get all my information without making a single move, and they must dispose of me in order to protect themselves. That is why I enlisted Farnsworth as a bodyguard; I could not trust my own people. In return for his services, I promised to use my best endeavors to clear the name of Beatrice Ancina from connection with this robbery and murder; and I knew that my promise would insure his fidelity. You had a striking demonstration of the wisdom of my choice to-night; for if he had not interfered they would have killed me. For your own protection, I have had you guarded, as well, by men who knew that their own lives depended upon your safety."

"This is interesting in the abstract, Vespoli; but I would remind you that you have contributed nothing to the principal object of my search, which is the recovery of the Borghese emerald," said Tommy impatiently. "I am not particularly concerned with the discipline of the Camorra, and I am disappointed in its resourcefulness; for even its leader seems unable to aid me in that."

Vespoli shrugged his shoulders, and looked at him incredulously. "Perhaps I have not laid sufficient stress upon Beatrice's passion for possession," he answered. "It would be impossible for me to overstate it." His reply was equivalent to an accusation, and I was relieved to see that Tommy, in turn, was incredulous.

"I can't misunderstand you—you believe that she has retained possession of the gem?" he said.

"I believe that she honestly intended to pay for it, in spite of its having come into her possession in an irregular way," replied Vespoli. "When she found that it was impossible for Farnsworth to give her title to it, and that she would have to give it up, her mania overcame her honesty, and she trumped up the story of the second theft. That theft would have been impossible without my knowledge, Mr. Williams; for as Salvatore Trama I had her property guarded more efficiently than it could have been policed by an army. Her personal maid is one of my most trusted people, and her servants have been under the closest surveillance by those who know their business better than the most perfectly trained police spy. Beatrice acknowledged to you that she had received the emerald, and I am able to assert positively that it was not stolen from her; so you may draw your own conclusions."

"If I accept that assertion, the conclusion is sufficiently obvious," replied Tommy dryly. "The thing which leads me to doubt the truth of it is that you have not used your knowledge of her guilt to control her."

Vespoli gave not the slightest indication that he was offended by the insinuation.

"My dear sir, your knowledge of women in general and of Beatrice Ancina in particular must be extremely limited," he said. "The position of the man who had something to offer in the way of a bargain would have been very different from that of the man who attempted to blackmail her. To the first she would have listened, because he appealed to her ruling passion; the second she would have had thrown out by her servants, and a word from her would cause him to be torn to pieces by the Neapolitan mob."

Tommy's eyes were like gimlets as

they met those of Vespoli. "I confess to a monumental ignorance about the fair sex; but I know something about mankind in general, and a great deal about you in particular, Vespoli," he said. "We shall take it for granted that Beatrice Ancina suffers from an aggravated case of the collector's mania; but you counted upon more than that in laying your plans. The knowledge that the gem was stolen, and that she must enjoy its possession in secret, would have poisoned it for her. She would never have dared to exhibit it."

There was a tantalizing smile on Vespoli's lips as he looked from one to the other of us.

"Unless?" he said, in the tone of a teacher prompting the stumbling recitation of a child.

"Unless your plan went further, and implied the possibility of passing a clear title with the emerald," said Tommy, quick to read the prompting.

"Bravo, Mr. Williams!" exclaimed Vespoli approvingly. "My estimate of your shrewdness was correct. With the emerald in the actual possession of another, Beatrice Ancina might have found it difficult to prove her title to it; but, as I told you when you first mentioned the jewel, possession has always been the best proof of ownership, and, with those nine points in her favor, it could never have been taken from her."

"And she knew that when she offered to restore it to Farnsworth?"

"When she pretended to offer to restore it," corrected the marchese cynically. "No, Mr. Williams, she did not, and she does not yet; for I was not imparting information which might strengthen my enemies' hand. It is yours, however—at a price."

Tommy smiled, and shook his head. "There is sufficient of a bargain between us now, Vespoli, and I'm not buying gold bricks," he said. "Just wait a few minutes, and I'll give you ocular demonstration that I am not blind." He opened a drawer of his desk and, taking a photograph from it, set to work on its glazed surface with a soft pencil.

Vespoli made a move to look over his shoulder; but when Tommy motioned to him to keep his seat he bowed, and watched him without comment.

For the quarter of an hour in which the artist was occupied with his task he entertained me so well that I almost forgot my distrust of the man; but the quick, instinctive movement of his hand to his hip pocket, when a nervous tapping at the door announced another visitor, recalled it, and with it my apprehensions for our own safety. Tommy had just given an exclamation of satisfaction which announced the successful termination of his labors; but at the interruption he turned the photograph face downward on the desk, and motioned to me to open the door.

Vespoli's quick shifting of position, that he might get his back against the wall, betrayed his fears; but when I opened the door I was confronted by no more dangerous person than Beatrice Ancina, her face pale under the stage make-up which she had not stopped to remove, her long cloak falling open and revealing the barbaric costume of Egypt's most beautiful queen; for that night she had played the part of *Cleopatra.* For just an instant her eyes swept the studio; then, motioning me aside with an imperious gesture, she walked straight to where Vespoli was trying to flatten himself into as small a space as possible against the wall.

"Vespoli—Salvatore Trama—devil!" she exclaimed. "Whoever or whatever you are, tell me the truth about this horrible thing into which you have dragged me!"

He looked at her helplessly, and his expression of bewilderment convinced me that he was sincere in the denial which he faltered; but she cut him short and, seizing the lapels of his coat, dragged him forward into the light.

"You lie!" she hissed at him passionately. "Your own face convicts you; for it is that of Salvatore Trama. Deny it if you dare, you cur!"

"I do not deny it; but you have nothing to complain of because I chose to serve you in disguise," replied Ves-

poli, when she gave him the opportunity to speak. "This is unjust, and——"

"Unjust? Serve me?" she interrupted scornfully. "Is it because of your service that my villa is even now being ransacked by the police—that the *carabinieri* are probably on their way to drag me to prison?"

Vespoli's expression was one of blank amazement, and he found no words to answer; but Tommy, who had watched their interview in silence, picked up the velvet-covered box from the desk and stepped between them.

"You may settle your little differences with Vespoli at your leisure, signorina; but I believe it is in my power to allay part of your anxiety," he said quietly. "The police may be searching your villa, but you are in no danger of arrest; for they will not discover the evidence which you fear." He held out the box.

Taking it from him, she opened it with trembling fingers. One glance at its contents, and she flung the case from her, holding the jewel itself in tightly clasped hands against her breast, as she looked furtively at the open door.

Then I knew that Vespoli's description of the mania which possessed her was true; for all her other fears were lost in the greater one that we might take the emerald from her. It was not that, but a quick command from Tommy which caused me to jump for the door, lock it, and slip the key into my pocket; for, while I was watching her, he had not failed to notice that Vespoli was edging quietly toward it.

"We shall not take any more chances on blundering; Clancy appears to have made mischief enough," said Tommy decisively. "Vespoli, I have a large crow to pick with you; but that can wait until I have reassured the lady. Signorina, please make yourself as comfortable as you can; and I will, to commence with, relieve you of another of your anxieties, by assuring you that your ownership of the Borghese emerald will not be seriously disputed."

She looked at him eagerly, and I realized that his last assurance was more comforting to her than the first.

"I would remind you that you are disposing of my property," sneered Vespoli. "It may not have the value of the original; but still it is not entirely worthless."

"I told you that I would attend to you in due time," Tommy reminded him grimly; and the marchese, noticing that his fists clenched significantly, relapsed into sullen silence. "Your friend Vespoli, signorina, tried to make me believe that the stone which you have in your hand, which was stolen from your house by his orders, is a copy of the original emerald. I believed all the time that he was lying; but I should be glad to have you confirm my suspicions."

She gave a little cry of fear as she opened her clenched hand to examine the contents; but a very short examination of the intaglio reassured her, and it was followed by a sigh of relief.

"Yes, he lied; this is the original stone," she said, and even as she spoke her hand again tightened on it as she concealed it in a fold of her dress. "Mr. Williams, I know enough to believe that Vespoli, or Salvatore Trama, had his price for silence. Must I pay twice?"

Tommy's face flushed, and I knew that the retort which sprang to his lips was an angry one; but he repressed it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you judge me on the theory that birds of a feather flock together," he said, glancing contemptuously at Vespoli. "Signorina, if I did not believe that you really owned the stone which you believe belongs to Farnsworth, there is nothing which even you could offer me in the shape of a bribe which would make me forget my manifest duty. I have reason to believe that the gem belongs to you, however, and I trust that I shall be able to demonstrate it."

She looked at him with a puzzled expression in her eyes, and Vespoli chuckled derisively.

"The wish is father to the thought!" he exclaimed. "You can't prove it, Williams."

Tommy walked to the desk and

picked up the photograph. "That remains to be seen; but here is the first link in my chain of evidence," he said confidently.

As he held it out to Beatrice, I saw that it was one of her own photographs; but with his pencil he had added to it a man's hat on the head, a mustache on the upper lip, and had suggested masculine attire in place of the feminine theatrical costume. The first glance at it brought a smile to her lips; but it quickly faded, and the photograph fell to the floor as she looked wonderingly at Tommy.

"I—I don't understand!" she stammered. "That was a picture of me before it was changed; but now it is a speaking likeness of poor Mr. Farnsworth!"

"I don't understand it all myself, signorina; but here is the man who can give us the explanation," said Tommy, turning to Vespoli.

By a fraction of a second, a blow from my fist anticipated the report of the Italian's revolver. The bullet which had been intended for Tommy went wide, and he nodded his appreciation of my service as he quickly searched the half-conscious man and relieved him of another revolver and a Camorra knife.

X.

Beatrice Ancina was not the kind of woman who screams and goes into hysterics in emergencies; she remained silent, and kept her place until we had helped Vespoli to a chair. He took the full count before he came back to a realization of what had happened; for my fist had caught him fairly, and back of the blow was the accumulated resentment of months which for the first time had found vent.

Tommy's face was very Mephistophelean as he watched consciousness return and saw the Italian's eyes search for a possible avenue of escape, and I felt that Vespoli was at last in a fair way to pay the penalty for his many offenses.

"Take your time about it, Vespoli," said Tommy contemptuously, when the marchese made an ineffectual effort to rise to his feet; for coördination of his muscles was slower in returning than his mental faculties. "Just remember that there are many good punches left where that last one came from, and that they will be handed to you without ceremony if you don't behave prettily."

A serious knife-wound Vespoli would probably have disregarded; but there is something in the Latin temperament which makes the shock of a hard blow particularly demoralizing. While I believed the man to have plenty of courage, I saw that he was in abject fear of me, and I emphasized Tommy's warning with the silent menace of a clenched fist.

"Signorina, an explanation is due to you, and I shall offer my part of it at once, and promise that the rest of it will be forthcoming when we ask for it," continued Tommy, nodding toward Vespoli, who cowered in his chair. He picked up the photograph and again held it out to her. "You have accused me of studying the woman when I should have been appreciating the rare art of the actress, and of trying to unmask the actress in the woman. I must plead guilty of both offenses; but this transformed photograph should be my justification." There was an unusual gentleness in his voice.

Beatrice looked at him in perplexity, and he motioned to her to be seated.

"I can't understand it," she said helplessly. "Why should this likeness which you have discovered have made you distrust me."

Tommy glanced significantly at Vespoli. "Perhaps your intimacy with that delegate would have been sufficient ground, without going further; but I was led to believe that the intimacy extended to actual complicity, and the likeness was the basis of that suspicion," he answered. "In the first place, signorina, you will acknowledge that such a likeness of feature and in form of face exists. Farnsworth has inherited from an Italian mother the dark coloring of her race, and you are light; but your experience in making up must

have taught you the ease with which coloring can be changed.

"Until to-night I have never had a close view of Farnsworth; but once I saw him in conversation with Vespoli in a café, and shortly afterward I saw you on the stage, and later at your own house. You offered an excuse for the non-appearance of Farnsworth, and he very evidently avoided coming to close quarters with me. I had recognized at once the striking similarity of shape and feature, and I confess that I believed the person to whom Vespoli was talking in the restaurant, who he told me was Farnsworth, was in reality Beatrice Ancina in masculine attire. It was not until I saw Farnsworth here to-night that I realized that I had been mistaken."

"What an absurd suspicion!" exclaimed Beatrice Ancina; but when she again studied the photograph for a moment the look of incredulity faded from her face. "It is a remarkable likeness, and it is wonderful how the little pencil work intensifies it," she admitted. "Perhaps you are not so much to blame, Mr. Williams, and if you can tell me why you should have suspected me I can understand."

"Anybody who has even a speaking acquaintance with Vespoli is a fair object of suspicion, and from what he told me I judged that your intimacy extended far beyond that," answered Tommy. "We must speak plainly, signorina. I believe that circumstances will justify you; but, when you concealed the emerald and claimed that it had been stolen, you were, in fact, a receiver of stolen property. Vespoli has offered a plausible explanation which would account for it, and in that explanation and the fact of the striking likeness between you and Farnsworth I believe that I have discovered the solution to this whole puzzle. I hope that I shall not offend you if I ask you very personal and, perhaps, painful questions." Tommy's voice and manner were so gentle and kindly that she recognized at once the friendliness which prompted him.

"I have nothing to conceal—you already know the very worst," she said frankly.

"Then I must go back of all the legends which have been woven about your origin, and ask you to tell me the exact truth concerning your immediate ancestry," said Tommy quietly.

The request brought a flush to her face. She opened her lips to speak, and then hesitated, looking apprehensively at Vespoli.

"Signorina, you may speak perfectly freely in front of Vespoli," said Tommy encouragingly. "I believe that he knows more than you do about the matter, and has traded on his information."

The marchese scowled vindictively, but maintained a sullen silence.

"It *is* a painful topic which you have hit upon, Mr. Williams, and one upon which I am unable to give you exact information," said Beatrice. "Rumor has asserted that I am everything, from the morganatic offspring of royalty to a waif from a gypsy camp. For all I know, I may be either one or the other. I have no recollection of my father and mother. I know that I was cared for in my infancy in the family of my foster parents. At eight years of age I was sent to a convent, and some person unknown to me directed my education. I was given every opportunity, and I studied under the best masters; but there was no evidence of personal affection in that direction, and I was left to choose my own career.

"Strange as it may seem to you, I have never attempted to lift the veil which hides my origin. I believe that I come of gentle people. I have made my own career, and my life has been a full one. I believe that I am twenty-eight years of age; but I am ignorant of the place of my birth and of the mother who bore me. I can give you the details of all that I remember of my early life; but I do not think that it will enlighten you, and it would be a cheerless story of loneliness and isolation."

There were tears in her eyes, and infinite pathos in her voice, as the simple, curt narrative brought vividly before us the picture of the loveless life of an

abandoned child. Vespoli alone was unaffected by it, and Tommy hesitated before asking her anything further.

"I shall not press you for those details, unless some one of them might point to the identity of your parents."

She shook her head. "There is nothing that I know which would do it," she replied. "Both my foster parents are dead; but I believe that they were themselves ignorant of my real origin. They told me that they were well paid for their care of me; but they could never trace the payments. Possibly the sisters at the convent knew; but you realize that they would never tell. That very ignorance has been a stimulus to me, Mr. Williams; it has urged me to strive for distinction in many ways, that I might show to those who had so heartlessly cast me off that the loss was not entirely mine."

Tommy nodded comprehendingly. "I can understand that spirit, signorina," he said. "Before we go further, I must ask you to consider very seriously what I am to tell you. You came here in more or less fear of exposure and disgrace, and your fears were not entirely unjustified. As I have assured you, I believe that you may be freed from all apprehension; but, if my suspicions are correct, it implies the lifting of the veil which you have always respected, and without your permission I should not do it."

"But if that permission is withheld?" she asked quickly.

"I shall still do my best to save you from publicity," said Tommy reassuringly. "I believe that the authorities will not be exacting if the property is all returned, and Farnsworth——"

"The emerald, too!" she exclaimed, and the light which came to her eyes told me that on one subject she was not sane.

Tommy held out his hand expectantly. "Yes—the emerald, too!" he said, with a little sternness in his tone. "That you cannot retain without proof of your title to it."

Her quick defiance melted away under his eyes, and, disregarding his outstretched hand, she made a gesture of submission. "You have my permission," she said reluctantly.

An exclamation of disappointment came from Vespoli's lips. "You will regret that to the longest day you live!" he exclaimed viciously, but he subsided quickly under Tommy's menacing gaze.

"You had your chance and made a sad mess of it, Vespoli," said my friend triumphantly. "Is it necessary for me to forge my chain, or are you prepared to supply the missing links?"

"Deductions and suspicions are not proofs," retorted the marchese sullenly. "I am not giving something for nothing."

"No; it is more your habit to get the goods without paying the price," said Tommy, and Vespoli tried to assume a bravado which I knew he did not feel. "Your silence can cause us inconvenience and delay; but you will pay heavily for it in the end. Are you willing to tell everything now, and trust to me to arrange matters quietly?"

Vespoli hesitated for a moment, and then shook his head. "I shall be more interested in watching you forge your chain," he answered cynically.

The setting of Tommy's jaw showed that his challenge was accepted. "Which means that all thought of truce between us is ended, and that you will get what is coming to you," he said, as he drew from his pocket the newspaper clipping which described Ragoni's death, and with it the paper which had accompanied the cameos. "This," he continued, as he held up the latter, "is the first piece of evidence which will insure that result. I assume that it was written by the late and unlamented Ragoni."

Vespoli watched him curiously as he held it up to the light.

"I imagine that writing materials were scarce in Ragoni's shop; he found it safer not to commit its secrets to paper," Tommy went on. "In emergency he took the first bit of paper which came to hand, and I suspect that he found it in the box which contained the cameos. It looked blank to him, Vespoli; for I doubt if he was high enough in the councils of the Camorra

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himself on the floor, he groveled at Tommy's feet. His babbling and pleading were unintelligible, and it was a nerveless wreck which I pulled back into the chair, while Tommy poured a stiff drink of brandy and held it to his lips. He fairly gulped down the fiery liquid; but while it served to revive him it did not restore his courage, and like a whipped cur he listened while Tommy laid down the law.

"Vespoli, for the moment I am through with you," he said. "The time for confession is past; but I may need your statement for confirmatory evidence. At ten to-morrow morning you will return here. If you do what I ask of you, I shall not hand you over to the mercies of the Italian law. At twelve o'clock to-morrow I shall leave this studio and go to the American consulate, taking with me the documents which will prove Beatrice Ancina to be the legitimate daughter of Walter Farnsworth; not one moment earlier or later. Now, repeat what I have told you, that there may be no mistake."

Slowly and falteringly Vespoli repeated it, almost word for word, and when he had finished Tommy pointed to the door.

"Now go!" he said sharply.

Feeling that I was releasing a dangerous beast, I again unlocked the door and let Vespoli pass out into the night.

XI.

"The Marchese Vespoli has had a night to reflect in, and it will be interesting to note the result of those reflections," said Tommy, after sipping his coffee. That was the first word he had spoken to me since the departure of Vespoli on the previous night; for when I turned from my careful fastening of the door he had gone to his own room, and it was part of our unwritten law of companionship that we should respect each other's reserves. I was consumed with curiosity; but I knew that no questioning on my part would make him speak until he was ready, and I held my peace.

"I was entirely honest with Beatrice Ancina," he continued. "The likeness fooled me until I saw Farnsworth in this studio, and I believed that Clancy's prisoner would turn out to be a woman. When I discovered my mistake, I was on the right track; for then the memory of Walter Farnsworth's face came back to me. There could be no question of the relationship; it explained a lot, and stimulated me into scaring Beatrice to come here."

"You did that?" I asked incredulously.

He nodded. "I dropped a hint to Captain Mordecai, of the *carabinieri*, and he had her house searched for a supposed thief; but she had a guilty conscience, and I counted upon her being scared at the news which was carried to her at the theatre," he said. "That was why I made Clancy carry Farnsworth away; for I hadn't counted upon his being here. I have sent for them, and it is from him, now that I am sure of my ground, that I shall get the proof I am looking for."

"You believe that he knows of the relationship?"

"Can you think of any other reason for his action?" asked Tommy, in turn, as he spread a piece of paper on the table beside his plate. "This is a fair translation of the cabalistic writing in sympathetic ink on the paper of Ragoni's letter. It is a message in the ancient Camorra cipher, signed with the 'Hat'—a play upon the Italian words signifying chief, and for three centuries the sign manual of the ruler of the society. It is the authorization of Vespoli to the local chief in America to carry out the plan agreed upon, and it is not difficult to guess what that plan was."

"It is for me," I acknowledged.

Tommy laughed. "Then you must wait until I fish it out of Farnsworth," he said, as he arose to open the door in answer to a knocking. A moment later that young man entered, under the jealous guardianship of Inspector Clancy.

The pallor of his face and the dark shadows under his eyes told of a sleepless night; but he was freshly shaven and dressed with scrupulous neatness.

Tommy greeted him cordially, and motioned him to a comfortable chair.

"Farnsworth, a lot of water has run under the bridge since you left here last night," he said, after the servant had cleared away the breakfast dishes. "I am sorry that your unwise confession has made it necessary to discuss matters in the presence of others; but Inspector Clancy must be convinced, if you are to be freed."

There was just a fleeting shadow of apprehension on Farnsworth's face; but he answered stolidly. "I still stand by that confession, and I shall perform my part of the contract," he said.

Tommy picked up the transformed photograph. "We'll discuss that later," he said. "I shall not try to bluff you. There is very much that I still have to find out; but it is a question of details and confirmation, not of the main facts. To begin with, I knew your father, and I am very familiar with the portrait of him which Carolus Duran painted in eighteen seventy-five, when he was just about your age."

"Every connoisseur is, I believe," said Farnsworth uneasily.

"As a work of art, yes; as a human document, no," continued Tommy quietly. "It was said to be a wonderful likeness when it was painted, and there is a curious thing about it, or rather about its likeness to you at the present day; for, in everything except the coloring, you might have posed for it."

Farnsworth made no comment; but his eyes wandered to the photograph which Tommy held in his hand.

"The transmission of likeness is a curious thing altogether," continued my friend. "Sometimes it is accompanied by no transmission of mental traits, and the child may inherit the features of one parent and the coloring of another; an exact physical likeness from a father and the temperament of the mother, or vice versa. This photograph offers a good illustration of such transmission."

Farnsworth took it eagerly and, after one glance at it, tore it in small pieces.

"Can't you let things go as they stand?" he asked bitterly. "The punishment falls on me."

"Perhaps not entirely," replied Tommy. "Do you know that the villa at Posilippo was searched by the police last night, and its owner——"

Farnsworth jumped to his feet so quickly that Clancy was startled and made a movement to restrain him; but I grasped him by the arm and whispered to him to be quiet.

"Damn you—this is the protection you afforded!" exclaimed Farnsworth passionately. "You have let her be dragged away to prison in spite of our agreement!"

Tommy faced him unflinchingly, and pointed to the chair. "Sit down!" he commanded sharply. "I am in the habit of keeping my part of an agreement, and she came to no harm."

Farnsworth obeyed him, without further question.

"More than that, she left this studio with the Borghese emerald in her possession, because I believe it to be her property," continued Tommy. "No matter what she may have believed, when she received it she was not receiving stolen property; for when it came into her hands it was restored to its rightful owner. I have set out to prove this, Farnsworth. Will you help me, or must I do it in spite of you?"

"What do you want of me?" asked Farnsworth helplessly.

"The truth, so far as you know it," answered Tommy, and now there was in his manner the same gentleness which he had shown to Beatrice Ancina. "Clancy is a police officer; but he is neither indiscreet nor without bowels of compassion. It is part of his business to see that crime is punished; but, other things being equal, he would be quite willing to have the punishment land on the guilty person."

Clancy, under the impression that Tommy had said something flattering, nodded sedately. "Sure, I c'udn't have said it better meself," he admitted.

"I have known the truth for years," Farnsworth blurted out bitterly. "I know that I am the son of a man whose mania had made him a criminal; but I

never knew the real truth until Vespoli's bloodhound told it to me in New York on the night of the robbery, and, under fear of exposure, made me his unwilling accomplice. You must have found out the details from him?"

Tommy shook his head. "No; only enough to enable me to make a pretty accurate guess, for I preferred to be under no obligation," he replied. "I assume that his agent tried to intimidate you, and, failing in that, carried out the plan by violence, and in such a way that it would cast suspicion upon you."

Farnsworth glanced uneasily from Clancy to me. In spite of my great curiosity, I should have been glad to leave the room; but I knew that Clancy would not be equally considerate.

"I may as well make a clean breast of it," said Farnsworth reluctantly. "You are so near the truth that I know you will get it anyway. My name isn't Farnsworth, except by courtesy, Mr. Williams; and I am not the legal heir of my father, Walter Farnsworth. You will do me the justice to believe that I was ignorant of this until very recently, although I knew that my father was hardly responsible for his acts when there was a question of acquisition for his collections. It was the threatened publication of that fact which made me yield, for the moment, to Vespoli's demands."

"He had documentary proofs?" asked Tommy eagerly.

"The certificate of my father's marriage to Lucia Rafaeli, the mother of Beatrice Ancina," admitted Farnsworth, flushing. "It made him a bigamist, and his marriage to my mother was nullified. You can imagine the effect which this produced. I was threatened with immediate publication of the scandal; the price of silence was to be the delivery of the Borghese emerald. My own foolishness had made that impossible legally; for it was already pledged, as you know. The Camorra is resourceful, however, and in my desperation I consented to what they claimed would be a farcical robbery. I gave them my keys to the house, and exact instructions; so that they might disconnect the buzzer which would alarm the watchman. I was half crazed when I did this, on the morning of the robbery. That night I stole away to Baltimore, just as Clancy asserts; but my intention was to forestall them and let them do their worst."

"You were too late?" prompted Tommy, when Farnsworth paused and buried his face in his hands.

"By half an hour," he groaned. "I went to the house, and the opened door told me that I had been anticipated. I stole in like a thief, and when I opened the door into the gallery the buzzing told me that they had neglected to disconnect the wire. That must have alarmed poor Jenkins and brought him to his death; for those men would not hestitate at murder. I went into the gallery and found him lying there; and then, like a fool, I fled. There was no trace of my confederates; but I met them on the train returning to New York, and they made no concealment of what had happened. They had the emerald, and they had gone beyond their instructions and taken the other intaglios and cameos for their own profit. It was on their advice that I went back to the Brayton to perfect an alibi, and it was after reading Beatrice's letter, which I had brought back with me, that I saw through the whole plot. These men were simply the tools of Vespoli; and I came here in the hope of securing the emerald for the bank, and of coming to an agreement with him to relinquish, as the price of silence, all that I had not squandered."

Tommy looked inquiringly at Clancy.

"This story is better than an alibi," he said quietly. "No jury would convict after hearing it."

"It'll be accepted for State's evidence if he squeals on his pals," admitted Clancy, with evident reluctance. "I'm listenin'."

"One of them was Ragoni, who was killed by Vespoli's orders, to prevent his talking," said Farnsworth. "The other was the man who tried to kill Vespoli last night when I interfered. He has also been condemned by the

Camorra, on Vespoli's charge of stealing for his own profit."

"These other cameos?" asked Tommy.

Farnsworth nodded. "That was the alleged cause; but, of course, Vespoli simply wanted to insure his own safety. It practically amounted to a duel between them, and I protected Vespoli, on his pledge that he would assist me after his own safety was assured."

Tommy looked pityingly at him. "You were relying on a broken reed," he said. "Were the papers proving your father's first marriage delivered to you?"

"Yes, I have them," answered Farnsworth. "I was man enough not to destroy them. They are at my banker's in Naples."

"Farnsworth, during your father's lifetime do you believe that the Camorra ever took action against him?" asked Tommy.

"Not that I know of; but he has often told me tales of the society," replied Farnsworth. "He claimed that it was gradually creeping into America, and predicted that it would be a curse to the country. He had known of its operation when he was in Italy, and I recall his saying that, if he still lived here, he would join it or pay it tribute for his own protection. He was very well acquainted with the local conditions."

"Then, if your belief is justified and they never attempted to blackmail him, you can rest assured that their story would never have stood the test with him," said Tommy positively. "They would have had his fortune, and would not have waited for you to play ducks and drakes with it. I expect Vespoli here every minute, and you must keep quiet while I question him. I'll get to the bottom of it."

"An' th' name of that other dago?" queried Clancy impatiently.

Tommy nodded assent to Farnsworth's inquiring look.

"Pasquale Gratiano," said Farnsworth.

Clancy gave an exclamation of astonishment. "Sure, that's th' name of th' guy wot bosses all th' guinny clambakes an' leads all th' Garibaldi processions an' th' like from th' Bend!" he said incredulously.

"And the man with whom I grappled last night; formerly Vespoli's right-hand man in New York," added Farnsworth. "He is at the bottom of most of the deviltry in Little Italy, and every hoky-poky seller and organ grinder pays him tribute."

Clancy was apparently unconvinced; but Tommy sharply warned him to be silent, as a rap on the door announced Vespoli's arrival.

The marchese had in a measure recovered his self-confidence, and he gave no evidence of surprise at seeing Clancy and Farnsworth with us. Tommy looked at him with twinkling eyes, and acknowledged his ceremonious greeting.

"Just as a measure of precaution, I shall ask Clancy to relieve you of any weapons you have about you," he said, glancing significantly at the hole in the plaster which Vespoli's bullet had made the night before. "You get so peevish when you are hard pressed that I can't trust you, and last night isn't a marker to what you are going to get to-day."

Vespoli smiled ironically; but he drew a revolver from his pocket and handed it to Clancy, who quickly passed his hands over the marchese to assure himself that he did not retain its fellow.

"There is no need for this precaution; I have decided to tell you the story and leave myself in your hands," said Vespoli. "That was simply for my own protection."

"Against Pasquale Gratiano?" suggested Tommy.

Vespoli was unable to restrain a vindictive glance at Farnsworth. "Whom I hope Clancy will have hanged for me!" he said viciously. "He is a bungler, and I have no use for failures."

"How you must hate yourself, then," said Tommy, grinning contemptuously. "Vespoli, the old leaders must be turning over in their graves at your clumsiness. You have dug around in the archives until you found a long-for-

gotten record, something which they had discarded because it would not stand the light; and you weren't clever enough to succeed where they failed."

"You don't care to listen to my story, then?" asked Vespoli, who was visibly perturbed at the direct accusation.

"I can tell it myself, thank you," answered Tommy, and I knew that the success of the shot which he had ventured at random made him sure of his ground. "The marriage certificate which you sent to America was genuine; but you know that it was not worth the paper on which it was written. Lucia Rafaeli was not free to marry; she was the wife of another man, and that is the reason why the religious ceremony was never followed by the civil one, which alone makes marriage legal in Italy."

Vespoli smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. "If you will compare dates, you will find that the ceremony took place before that law went into effect," he said triumphantly. "That marriage was legal; for she was a widow."

"I'll come to that directly; for at twelve precisely I must take my proofs to the consulate," said Tommy, emphasizing the mention of time. "The first husband of Lucia Rafaeli was believed to have been executed by the Bourbons, along with a dozen other Neapolitans interested in the revolt of sixty-nine. In all good faith she married Walter Farnsworth; but I am sorry to say that the good faith was on her side. He married her that he might obtain, through her influence with a Borghese prince, one of the remaining heirlooms of that impoverished house. With that in his possession, he deserted her and married—this time with all due formality—the daughter of another great family, who brought to him as dowry many of the choicest things in his great collection. He would have repeated the performance a dozen times, had opportunity offered; but fear of the vengeance of the high Camorra, which at that time did not extend outside the old kingdom of Naples, banished him forever from Italy."

Farnsworth listened in bewilderment, and Tommy turned to him apologetically.

"I am sorry to have to speak so plainly; but remember that I do not hold your father entirely responsible," he said. "On the subject of collecting he was insane. He acquired what he wished legitimately, if he could; if his wealth was not sufficient, he did not hesitate at theft—or worse. When he found that he was legally free from Lucia Rafaeli, he deserted her, and he never knew that he had a daughter—the woman you know as Beatrice Ancina."

"That will require a lot of proof!" sneered Vespoli. "The education of 'la bella Bice' cost a lot of money."

"Which was furnished by Luigi Rafaeli after he was released, a twisted, mutilated wretch, from the tortures of the Bourbons, from the living tomb to which they had consigned him in the dungeons under the castle of Ischia. He had not been executed with the others, and he was released when Victor Emmanuel took Naples. He assumed the responsibility which Walter Farnsworth should have borne, and when Lucia Rafaeli died he cared for the child, to whom Farnsworth had bequeathed only the curse of his mania."

Vespoli shrugged his shoulders. "A pretty story, but a romance without the proofs; and those you would find it difficult to produce," he said.

Tommy arose and walked toward the door of his bedroom. "I have the proofs, safe enough; but it would not be fair to act without consulting everybody concerned," he said, as he beckoned to some one on the inside. "Beatrice has been listening to the story; she came in from the hallway as you entered by the other door."

Beatrice Ancina, dressed plainly in black, which made more marked the pallor of her skin, came in and, without speaking, took the chair which Tommy drew forward for her.

"Signorina, you have heard the story I have told; it is true in every detail. Technically the marriage of your mother to Walter Farnsworth is void; but morally it is valid. It would require a

legal process to legitimatize your birth, however, and that would imply publicity."

"There need be no publicity," she answered quietly. "In the eyes of the law I am the daughter of Luigi Rafaeli. I shall never advance that claim; but I should prefer to believe that I am the daughter of the man who sacrificed everything to his country and assumed the burden which another's treachery had placed on his shoulders, rather than be the acknowledged heiress of one who was a slave to his own desires."

"Even at the expense of sacrificing the Borghese emerald?" insinuated Vespoli, before Tommy could check him.

"The Borghese emerald shall be returned to New York," she answered. Arising from her chair, she walked over and placed it on the table. For a moment she hesitated there, her eyes fixed on it hungrily.

Tommy gave an exclamation of relief when finally she turned resolutely away and resumed her seat.

"This simplifies matters," he said quickly. "With its return, there will be no further trouble from New York; and I don't believe the Baltimore police will reach the bottom of this mystery. Clancy, there would be little glory in taking Farnsworth back without Gratiano, and I suggest that you take his parole to appear as a witness, and search for your other man."

Clancy hesitated. "Sure, it's not a word of proof I've heard of all this," he objected. "Youse makes it out a family affair, an' it's not meself that cares about their skeletons; but I'll have th' crook that did for Jenkins. Gratiano it may be; but this guy took it on himself, an' I'm not lettin' th' one go till I get th' other."

"Williams, I'm not worrying about what will happen to me; but you have brought serious accusations against a dead man, without furnishing a particle of proof to sustain them," chimed in Farnsworth, who had shrunk under Beatrice's contemptuous arraignment of their father.

Tommy opened a drawer of his desk and drew out a carefully prepared statement.

"This is a transcript of the whole thing," he said. "I have written it all out, and you can all sign it. I am sure Longley will accept it and, on the return of the stolen property, drop prosecutions. Vespoli, your name first, if you please."

The marchese picked up the paper and, after reading the first page, replaced it on the table.

"Clever romancing!" he said sarcastically. "Assuming, for the sake of argument, that there are Camorra archives—they would not be public property!"

"Not unless they were made so by the stupidity of its incompetent leader," retorted Tommy, as he drew the Ragoni letter from his pocket. "Vespoli, this is a curious piece of paper, and it holds more than one secret. I'll trace its history for you. As I told you, Ragoni probably found it in the package with the stolen cameos, and utilized it for his letter. It had been enclosed by the thieves who acted under your direction, and, while it appeared blank to him, the application of heat brought out your instructions, written in the Camorra cipher in sympathetic ink which requires the action of heat to make it visible. Can you tell me where you obtained this paper?"

"I would remind you that I have not admitted that I ever saw it before," answered Vespoli sullenly.

"Very well. I'll hark back on its history, then," continued Tommy, as he drew a vial of colorless liquid from his pocket. "My first discovery was accidental; the cipher appeared when I held the paper against the electric-light bulb to try and discover a watermark; for the structure of the paper struck me as being curious. It was of unusually fine quality, entirely unlike the modern Italian papers. Following that discovery, I looked for others; and from what I found I can reconstruct its history."

Vespoli faced him, unperturbed. "More romance?" he said sneeringly.

"No; melodrama—the real dark-lantern-and-dagger kind," answered Tom-

my. "You as the villain, looking over dusty old documents which had been handed on to you, and discovering a packet wrapped in a piece of blank paper for protection; its contents suggesting a foundation for blackmail. Finally your plans are all laid, and you need to transmit instructions. Certain of the documents you send, and on the blank paper which had enclosed them you write your orders. This, Vespoli, is that paper which you believed to be blank."

We all watched him curiously while he flattened it out on the desk and poured a few drops of the liquid on it. Then, as the paper absorbed the moisture, other writing appeared, almost microscopic in its fineness, but as legible as copper-plate engraving.

"This, Vespoli, is the history which I have transcribed on that paper!" exclaimed Tommy triumphantly. "It was written by Luigi Rafaeli, a high officer of the Camorra when that society directed its energies to resisting the Bourbon oppression. You can find the secret in any text-book of chemistry, and when the paper dries the writing will fade again. It would have been the death warrant of Walter Farnsworth if he had again set foot in Italy; but at that time the hand of the Camorra did not stretch across the sea.

"Sign that paper, and I let you go from here to fight for your own life with the men you have betrayed. Refuse, and I send for Captain Mordecai and give him the information which will make the other archives accessible. There is no time for argument; for at twelve I go to the consulate, and that paper must be in order!"

Vespoli had been at first defiant; but when Tommy finished he dipped a pen in the ink well and signed his name to the transcript. Then Tommy read it aloud—a clear, short statement embodying Farnsworth's confession, the account of our finding the cameos in Ragoni's shop, his subsequent death, and the explanation of the return of the Borghese emerald.

"It was sent to you direct, without bargaining, that you might taste the sweets of possession, signorina," he explained. "When you pretended that it had been stolen from you, he knew that his belief was justified; you would have sacrificed much to have retained possession of it. Then it was stolen from you, in turn, by his orders; and if we had not forced his hand he would have driven a hard bargain with you. He feared that we would obtain information from his tools, and one of them he had murdered. With the other, who is forewarned, he has yet to reckon. There is an old saying about what happens when thieves fall out, and I am content to let things stand as they are; for the honest people have got their due, and I expect that Vespoli will get his. We will all sign this paper, and I think that I can guarantee that there will be no further trouble for any one from Longley. The real culprit has passed to a higher court, and I know that he will not wish to visit the sins of the father upon the children."

In turn we all signed beneath Vespoli's signature, and the noonday bells chimed as Tommy carefully blotted the paper. Vespoli listened, and looked at him expectantly when he placed the paper in his pocket and picked up his hat and long ulster.

"Exactly noon, Vespoli," he said quietly. "I told you last night that I should leave at this time. Take off your overcoat!"

Vespoli hesitated; but at a nod from Tommy Clancy walked toward him, and he quickly obeyed.

Tommy held out his own in place of it. "You will wear this," he said sternly. "We are sufficiently alike for my purposes."

Vespoli's dark face went white, but he obeyed without protest, and, after he had buttoned the coat, Tommy placed the hat on his head and pulled the brim over his eyes.

"Clancy, you will walk behind this man for two squares from the studio," continued Tommy curtly. "If he attempts to take his hands from the overcoat pockets, or the hat from his head, you can grab him and turn him over to the first member of the *carabinieri* you meet. I'll do the rest."

Clancy nodded, and dropped the pistol he had taken from Vespoli into his side pocket.

"Youse can trust me," he said, and without a word Vespoli left the studio, Clancy following like grim fate.

Farnsworth and Beatrice watched the transformation in bewildered silence, but I took my place beside Tommy in the open doorway; for I understood the emphasis which he had placed on the time when he should leave the studio. A moment later there was the sharp report of a revolver, followed so closely by a second that they sounded almost as one.

Together we raced down the wide marble staircase.

On the floor of the entrance hall lay two bodies; Vespoli's with a bullet hole squarely between the eyes, another in the last agonies of death, with a smoking pistol clenched in the right hand. Clancy stood with his back against the wall, the revolver which he had taken from Vespoli presented threateningly. Without waiting to explain, Tommy took it from him and dropped it close to Vespoli's hand; then, grasping the astonished inspector by the arm, hurried him back to the studio and locked the door.

"Vespoli met the death he had planned for me," he said grimly, after he had regained his breath. "Let his memory be credited with the death which you inflicted on his assassin."

"I was just a second too late, sir," said Clancy regretfully. "It was me as shot Gratiano."

"Then you had better keep quiet about it," retorted Tommy sharply. "You were justified; but Italian law is peculiar. Vespoli's story was poppycock. He was in no danger from that man, and the attempted assassination from which Farnsworth saved him was a farce. Here—take this property and this paper to Mr. Longley, and tell him your story; but get out of Italy as quickly as you can, and keep your mouth shut until you do."

He handed him the paper and the cameos, and I knew that one part of his plot the man who lay dead in our hallway had builded upon a firm foundation; for Beatrice Ancina started involuntarily from her chair, to restrain him when he dropped into his pocket the Borghese emerald.

THE END.

A SPIDER WHICH DIGS

THERE is in California a species of spider, called the trapdoor spider, on account of the peculiar hole it digs for itself in the ground, in front of which it places a kind of door. The hole varies from a half to a full inch in diameter, according to the size of the spider, and is from eight to twelve inches deep, with a sharp bend a little way down.

The ground chosen is invariably the hardest and closest in the vicinity—an old roadway, bound together like so much cement, is the favorite spot. The spider not only digs without leaving anywhere a trace of the displaced earth—which goes no one knows where—but also furnishes its residence. When the little tunnel home is finished, it lines the walls with silky webbing, and hangs by a thread before the entrance a black, woolly-looking door of mixed web and mud, hardly distinguishable from the ground. It sets this door slightly ajar, and lurks behind it, ready to pounce out upon any passing fly.

For a time it fares sumptuously, but it generally meets with a sudden death, when its enemy, the "road-runner" bird, pecks down the door and, thrusting in a long, sharp beak, impales it before it has time to scuttle back for safety around the bend in the burrow.

Big Medicine

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Lonesome Trail," "Ananias Green," Etc.

In cowboy parlance, "to make big medicine" means to boast. The Flying U outfit is much disgusted when Chip hires a new hand who is without a peer in this respect. They all join in an effort to expose the braggart, and learn things about themselves

HEN the boys of the Flying U clanked into Rusty Brown's place, they found the air already vibrant with the voice of a man—not a large man, as men go; but a man with a large voice. The barber and two sheepmen and the hotel dishwasher were listening very attentively, and Rusty Brown was leaning his stomach upon the bar and gazing straight at the face of the speaker. So absorbed was he that he did not even nod at the Happy Family. Indeed, his glance spoke annoyance at the interruption.

The stranger looked at them casually, observed their chaps and spurs, and waved his glass toward them inclusively.

"Now, yuh see, it's just as I been telling yuh," he remarked, at the full capacity of his lungs. "Here's a bunch that I'd call near-cowpunchers—and if they're as truthful as they ought to be they'll bear me out in it. I leave it to them if the real range ain't flattened out like a busted circus balloon. I leave it to them if cowpunchers—*real* ones—ain't scarcer right now than breech-clout Injuns. I'll bet yuh all yuh dare they don't even pretend they're doing more than make a bluff at it.

"Why, I quit the Coconino country because it was getting so blame tame and civilized yuh couldn't so much as shoot the lights out in a dance hall, or any little thing like that, without being run in—*run in,* mind yuh—and *fined,* by cripes!" He paused while Rusty was refilling his glass.

The Happy Family lined up silently, their faces impassive.

"And as for bad hosses," went on he of the voice, smacking his lips and waving the glass again, "honest to grandma, I've just about give up riding altogether. Time was when yuh could get out and have a run for your money; but the benches they lead out to yuh these days—less said the better! I wouldn't insult my saddle by throwing it across their spines. Honest to grandma, I've been a lot tempted to stake myself to a bicycle. They've got more ginger to 'em than nine-tenths uh the hosses nowadays."

Pink at this point simply had to speak or burst. "I suppose you could ride almost any kind of a horse, couldn't you?" he ventured admiringly.

The stranger turned slowly, and looked pityingly down upon Pink. "Little one," he said, after a minute, "nothing but your youth and innocence could save yuh after them words. Don't ever repeat 'em. Since yuh ask me, in your ignorance, I will say that the hoss don't walk that I can't ride in my sleep. While I'm indulging in personal history, I might add that I'm a mighty bad man to pick a fuss with. My enemies was all good friends uh mine, down in Arizona, whilst I was around. I'll pass over your question, as I said, and I'll let yuh drink with

Bud Welch, the slickest rider and roper, and the damnedest fighter yuh ever touched glasses with."

Pink clinked glasses with him, and looked impressed. "I suppose you're a fine shot, too," he prompted, in his soft, girlish voice.

"Well, now, yuh never seen any real shooting done, little one, if yuh ain't seen *me* twirl the six-gun. If yuh'd hold a dime out between your thumb and forefinger I'd put a hole in the middle at ten paces without your knowing when it happened; at fifteen paces I could do it—at twenty"—he stopped impressively—"I wouldn't guarantee not to trim your nails up, once in seven or eight times. Want to try it?"

"I—I don't believe I've got a dime that needs punching to-day, thank you." Pink blushed, and edged away from him.

"I could clip the fire off that cigarette uh yours as far as I could see it," asserted the Man Who Could Do Things, whirling and glaring at Slim with eyes that were of a pale, unpleasant blue, and that stood out upon his face like the eyes of a frog.

"By golly, I guess you can wait till you're asked!" snorted Slim, growing purple to the ears.

The man glared again, then grinned in a way that startled one, so white and even were his teeth, and so nearly did his mouth approach his ears when he stretched his lips—a straight, long gash clean across his face.

Slim backed involuntarily and said: "Well, by golly!"

"I told yuh these ain't nothing more than tin imitations of the real thing," said Bud Welch triumphantly to Rusty. "Why, down where I come from, they made me plumb weary plugging dimes for pocket pieces. The girls down there used to hold up dimes for me and then string 'em on ribbons for bracelets, and count to see which had the most, and chew the rag over which one stood the farthest off whilst I plugged their dimes. Honest to grandma! I'm getting kinda sorry I drifted north. You're a heap more tamer here than they are down there—and I can't say no worse. I expect I'll find myself teaching a young ladies' class in Sunday school come next Sunday."

"We haven't any Sunday school in Dry Lake," remarked Pink deprecatingly.

"Well, by cripes!" retored Bud Welch, elaborately disappointed. "And that there's a plumb shame—seeing the infant class is all assembled."

The Happy Family shifted uneasily, not sure whether it would be beneath their dignity to resent this blatant stranger.

"Say, you're a real wolf, aren't yuh?" said Andy Green, with a smile.

"I sure am, old-timer. Do yuh want me to stick my nose in the air and sing m' war song?" flashed the other. "Only, I ought to tell yuh that I don't howl unless I mean business. Fists or guns, it's all the same to me, by cripes!"

"Don't get excited," purred Andy. "We're some bad ourselves, but we don't eat strangers—so long as they're polite and remember their manners."

"Meaning what?" inquired Bud sharply.

"Meaning anything—meaning nothing. Say, boys, who was doing all that big talking about billiards a mile or two back? I see the table's empty."

They took the hint, and turned their backs, literally and figuratively, upon Bud Welch. He stared after them, opened his amazing mouth to speak, and turned instead to Rusty. So they got rid of him and his pretensions.

"I'd like to have taken a fall out of that big-mouthed jasper—only it would flatter him up too much to take him serious," observed Pink disgustedly.

"He's sure big medicine; I've bumped into that brand of human before," said Andy. "They're plumb wearisome to listen to."

"I betche he couldn't ride Pink's old Toots, even!" asserted Happy Jack, and thereby precipitated argument of another sort with Pink.

When, after an hour or so of more or less amicable wrangling around the pool table, they returned to the front part of the saloon, the boastful one was

gone; and they did not even miss him and his voice. They were sufficient unto themselves, and they had amusement in plenty, without listening to half-drunken strangers bragging about imaginary virtues and accomplishments; besides, the breed was not uncommon, even in that land where men were numbered by the dozen instead of by the thousand.

Later, when they were back in camp and were lying around in the grass, with their hats tilted against the slanting rays of the sun, Chip Bennett rode leisurely up to the tents, and beside him was another.

"So help me Josephine, it's that big-mouthed gazabo from Arizona!" cried Pink, looking up in disgust.

"I betche Chip's went and hired him," added Happy Jack misanthropically. And for once Happy was right.

"Mamma!" sighed Weary, moving his head into the shade. "I'm going to strike Chip for a raise in my wages. If I've got to listen all summer to that frog-eyed terror from Coconino County they've got to pay me extra."

"Hello, children!" greeted Bud Welch loudly. "This here looks almost like the real thing—from a distance. Honest to grandma, yuh look just like a magic-lantern view—'cowboys on the plains at sunset.' It's a shame yuh can't be took just as yuh are. You'd sure make a hit when some four-eyed sky-pilot throwed yuh on the sheet at a church entertainment, with ice cream and lemonade after the show." He smiled his wide smile.

Pink, gritting his teeth, half arose from where he lay.

But Andy Green pulled him back. "Don't get excited," he murmured close to his ear. "The higher he soars the farther he'll have to drop. Let him alone—we'll take all that out of him when the sign's right."

The Happy Family may not have recognized telepathy as an exact science, but Andy's viewpoint seemed to have been unanimously adopted, for no one resented the banter openly. Happy Jack did say, "Aw, gwan!" but the ejaculation was involuntary.

"No, sir, I don't 'gwan,'" said the newcomer, with a grin. He came over and squatted upon his heels, reached mechanically for Pink's book of cigarette papers, and otherwise deported himself as a man quite at home with them. "I don't 'gwan,' because I've give my word to stay with yuh and help yuh out—and learn yuh some things. Anybody got a match handy?"

"Couldn't yuh give us absent treatment?" hinted Jack Bates.

"I might—if yuh learnt easy enough. Say, how are things up this way, anyhow? This much of an outfit?"

They did not like him and his lordly ways, but his tone had changed with the last two sentences, and he seemed disposed to come down to their humble level and talk like an ordinary human being who did not know quite everything. So they met him on the common ground of range gossip, and treated him much better than they thought he deserved.

It is true that, when the talk drifted to riding—a favorite topic with men who spend their days in the saddle—Bud Welch grew once more boastful and laughed at the assertion of Happy Jack that the Flying U owned some "bad actors."

"Honest to grandma, I'd be willing to tackle anything yuh got in your cavvy, bareback, and with nothing but a rope on his nose!" he jeered. "I sized up the bunch when we rode past; there's nothing there, boys. I know a bad hoss when I see him."

"Yuh do?" queried Andy Green, thinking of Weaver, the blue roan he had ridden with much stress at the Northern Montana fair, not so long before that he had forgotten the thrill of victory.

"Yuh bet I do. The hoss don't live that can fool me. There's a devil looking out uh the eye of every mean hoss—if yuh know enough to read the sign. I don't care how much they play off the ba-ba-sheep in their actions, they can't tame down the cunning devil in their eyes. Why, I can *feel* it the minute I lay hands on one. It's something yuh can't explain, and yuh can't

learn; yuh've got to be born with the instinct. My old dad was like that; he had a big outfit in New Mexico—and gambled it away when I was a kid like this young sprig here."

He meant Pink, and Pink's fists doubled unconsciously.

"But he could sure ride—my old dad could," went on Bud. "He used to *hunt* trouble, by cripes! If he heard tell of an outlaw *caballo,* didn't make no difference where it was or how much trouble it was to get him, he wouldn't sleep nor eat, scarcely, till he'd got his loop on him. Lord—lord! I've sure seen some riding in my time, boys!"

Deceitfully mild, they let him run on until he grew tired; and not even Happy Jack cut in with the observation that they had a rider or two of their own, and a horse or two that could make any man earn his victory. But, before they slept, Pink and Andy Green went unobtrusively to find Chip and take him where they might have a word or two in private.

"Say," began Pink, when they were well out of hearing, "do yuh know anything about that Coconino terror that's telling it so scarey to the bunch?"

"No," said Chip, and glanced through the dusk toward where the voice of Bud Welch sounded, monotonously aggressive. "He struck me for a job, and he claimed to know all about punching cows, so I hired him. What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing," put in Andy, "only he's sure been making big medicine ever since he struck camp—and down in Rusty's he was running off at the face about the things he could do. He's one of them gazabos that talk big and act small. I know the breed. He's got lots of imagination and a pair uh leather lungs to proclaim himself with, and nothing to back 'em up. He's missed his calling; where he'd ought to be is barking for the side show of a three-ring circus."

Chip grinned. "Maybe so. But I don't own a show uh that size and description, so I can't put him where he belongs. He'll have to be just a plain, ordinary stock hand while he stays with this outfit. Did he send you fellows here——"

"By gosh—no!" Andy pinched out the fire on the cigarette he was smoking, and ground the half-burnt tube under his heel. "What I want is to lend him The Weaver. He's been mourning because there ain't any bad hosses to ride, no more—nothing with ginger to 'em. I kinda felt sorry for him, he seems to feel so bad about it. So I just thought I'd spare The Weaver out uh my string—for a while. I kinda thought he might have *ginger* enough——"

"You—you devil!" But Chip had heard part of what Bud Welch had been declaiming, and he grinned again. "Are you willing to take chances on breaking the fellow's neck?"

"Oh, *I* wouldn't hurt him—no! Yuh see, he claims to *like* mean hosses——"

"And Pink here is all nerved up to sacrifice Nigger-white, I reckon!"

"Yuh rung the bell," said Pink, with a dimpling smile.

"The chances are," mused Chip, undecided, "he can't ride to amount to anything. I was going to give him a string of gentle ones."

"Don't you do it, Chip!" murmured the voice of Weary behind them. "You let him have Glory for a day or two. He's just been handing out the wildest yarn yuh ever listened to, about a cayuse he rode one summer. I never heard Andy, even, lie so bold and free as our friend from the south has been doing."

"Say, Chip!" came the voice of Irish cautiously from the gloom. "When yuh give Big Medicine his string in the morning, just stake him to Piebiter, will yuh? I can spare him, all right, and——"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered Chip, greatly amused. "Go on to bed, you bunch uh conspirators. I didn't hire that talkative person for you fellows to kill off first thing. Cal," he began sternly, as another dim form showed near them, "don't offer me that kicking cayuse you've been threatening to knock in the head. I've had enough rough horses shoved at me in the last

five minutes to build up a riding contest."

"Well, if yuh happen to run short uh——" stammered Cal, a little confused, because he had fancied he was the only revengeful one in the lot.

"If we're going to ride with that frog-eyed freak, we've got to take some uh the swelling out of his head; we're plumb *obliged to!*" growled Andy. "Here's me with that championship belt stowed away in my war bag, and him proclaiming that nobody but him can ride! If he's going to stay in this camp, he's got to ride The Weaver, and ride him straight up—or else he's got to sing lower and more mild!"

Chip, although tempted, endeavored to be impartial, as became the foreman of the outfit. "Now, look here, boys," he said seriously, "you want to remember that this outfit has some work to do; we're not out for fun, or to take the conceit out of men that love to talk big. He's got it coming, maybe—but what I want of him most is straight riding where it will do the most good. *Sabe?* This isn't any riding contest, yuh know."

He turned and left them, and Cal was ill-natured enough to remark that Chip was afraid to stay, because he knew blamed well he'd give in. There were, he said, certain disadvantages in packing around the dignity of foreman, and there were times when Chip acted haughty as sin, just because he thought he had to. It made him tired—so tired that he marched straight off to the bed tent without another word to any one.

The others, if one might judge from their general attitude toward the world and one another, were tired also. They had felt sure of the chance to discipline Bud Welch in the time-honored manner of the range—so sure that they had permitted him to say many things which, if there were to be no future reckoning, were scarcely to be endured.

"So help me Josephine—next time he calls me little one, I'm going to land on him like a wolf!" exclaimed Pink, his hat crown just even with Weary's forehead.

"I can't say I blame yuh, Cadwolloper. His manner is sure irritating," sympathized Weary. "I wouldn't be none surprised if Andy is building a scheme to let him down on his face, though. Yuh better hold back and see. Maybe yuh won't have to bother with him at all. Maybe some one else will gentle him down."

At daylight they were eating their breakfast hastily. When the sky reddened, the saddle horses came trotting over the hill and rushed down into the rope corral, docile from long custom. Bud Welch, who had brought his riding gear with him from the south, stood smoking beside his saddle, his rawhide rope coiled over his arm. He appeared to be quite business-like and at peace with himself, and he grinned widely at any man who would look at him. Pink he was inclined to treat in a fatherly manner, and Pink made signs enough for an Indian council to Chip. But Chip ignored them all, and pointed out a steady-going little bay to Bud.

They watched Bud covertly when he widened his loop, and they were a bit disappointed when he made only one throw and got his horse neatly over the head; but, as the little bay never gave any man trouble, there would have been no excuse for missing.

Unenthusiastically, Big Medicine saddled the bay and mounted.

With one accord, and without a word of secret discussion, the Happy Family proceeded to catch their "nifties." There are ways of taking the conceit out of a stranger besides mounting him upon something more than he can manage, and even Happy Jack roped a horse he was wont to pass by, the only one in his string that would do more than "crow-hop" on a frosty morning. Andy hesitated, his rope poised for a cast at The Weaver. It was not fear that made him turn away and cast the loop over the head of a spiteful, fleabitten gray which had a trick of bolting at unseasonable times. He wanted to save The Weaver for an emergency. Pink, however, saddled Nigger-white; Irish roped out Piebiter, the worst in his string; and Weary chose Glory—

and that when Glory had the roll of eye which promised trouble.

So it was a tumultuous group that went careering away from camp toward the sunrise; on heads and hind feet they went, mostly, and the Happy Family rode with deliberately careless poise, conscious to the last nerve of their audience of one—their audience who loped docilely in the rear, depending upon quirt and spur to keep them in sight.

He did not complain, and he was not set afoot because his horse could go no farther. He jogged into camp at dinner time ten minutes behind the others, and he grinned his wide grin at the Happy Family when he rode past them and dismounted at the corral. His pale, protruding eyes seemed paler and more protruding because his face was red with heat and wind, and something indefinable in his general attitude exasperated the Happy Family greatly.

While they were eating in the shady spots around the mess wagon, he volunteered his first remark, speaking in a paternal tone to Pink.

"Say, little one, yuh strike me as being a kid with talents. Uh course, a man couldn't prophesy correct just exactly what yuh'll amount to when you're growed; but I take the risk uh saying that, if you're trained proper by somebody that's competent, yuh'll likely be able to ride—in ten years or so."

Pink was nearly twenty-four, though he looked eighteen at most. He was also a broncho-fighter with a reputation—a reputation he had earned honestly; and he had that morning made a ride upon Nigger-white that he considered good.

"Sorry I can't say the same for you," he flung back crossly. "Judging from your style and general appearance, and the wild rides you've been making by word uh mouth, it'd take about a hundred years for yuh to learn anything."

Bud Welch—or Big Medicine, as he was fast becoming known among them—turned and grinned at the others. "Ain't he the sassy kid?" he asked them indulgently. "His mother'd oughta take a hairbrush to 'im."

The Happy Family did not laugh. Big Medicine was a stranger among them, and he was not popular. Their sympathies were all with Pink.

"Why don't yuh chastise him yourself?" asked Cal pointedly.

"Oh, well—I was a fresh young sprig myself once," Bud explained carelessly. "He'll get over it—if somebody don't kill him off inadvertent, some time when he gets to handing out them rude observations."

Pink suddenly went fighting mad. He jumped up, threw his plate full at Big Medicine, and swore in an extremely adult masculine fashion.

Big Medicine wiped a splatter of beans off his neckerchief. "Say, I *will* paddle yuh—and paddle yuh *good*, by cripes!" he asserted reprovingly. "Yuh sure have got about as poor manners as any kid I ever seen." He set his half-emptied plate carefully down in the grass. "Yuh watch that a minute, Spikes," he told Weary, who was nearest, and arose. "I hate to spank such a pretty-looking young one—but, honest to grandma, he's a fright!"

The Happy Family spilled much good food in getting to where they could watch the proceedings. It was well worth while, though they never did agree as to just what happened up to a certain moment. Undoubtedly there were many details which they failed to observe—such was Pink's whirlwind method of fighting. They all saw clearly that he started in his usual manner of punching his opponent hard and often—just when he stopped, no one seemed to remember; but the climax was fixed forever clearly in their minds.

When the evolutions ceased, they saw Pink upon his face with his head thrust between two spokes of the wagon wheel—like a pig in a poke—and Big Medicine kneeling upon Pink's legs. He was spanking Pink thoroughly and methodically with his doubled-up hat, and he was admonishing him in his full-lunged voice:

"I sure do hate to do this to yuh, little one, but it's got to be did. Bad boys grow up to be bad men if they ain't learnt better whilst they're

young, and some day yuh'll thank me for takin' yuh in hand and learning yuh manners before it's too late. Yuh mustn't throw things at folks. It's rude and unpolite. And yuh mustn't sass growed-up folks. Yuh'll git into all kinds uh trouble if yuh don't quit it. I want yuh to reelize that I'm doing this for your good, and not my own individual pleasure. Now, get up, and see what a nice boy yuh can be!"

Pink got up, but he did not look as though he were going to be a nice boy. He went, scowling and wiping the blood from his nose, to the bed tent.

"He's gone to git his gun," Happy Jack croaked to Bud unnecessarily.

"Well, didn't yuh never see a man go after his gun before? What's strange about that?" asked Big Medicine, and sat down again, with his plate in his lap, to finish his interrupted dinner.

Happy Jack looked at him uncertainly, encountered his pale, staring eyes, and turned abruptly away. No one said a word.

In a minute Pink was back, and he had his six-shooter and looked less than ever like a nice boy. "Damn your rotten soul!" he cried. "Heel yourself, and do it quick, for I'm going after yuh! I wouldn't take that from anybody that stands on two legs."

Big Medicine looked up at him, grinned tolerantly, and took a very large bite of bread. "Now, don't get peevish," he remonstrated, with his mouth full. "I ain't going to hurt yuh no more."

"Oh, you big-talking, big-mouthed thus-and-so!" stormed Pink, standing over him, itching for an excuse to shoot. "You that's such a holy terror down in Coconino County! You that can plug dimes at fifteen paces, and ride anything that ever wore hair, and are such a hell of a fellow all around—get up and show us what yuh can do! *I'll* shoot with yuh—if yuh ain't scared to try it. I'll give yuh a fair show. I ain't——" Pink, the soft-voiced, the angel-faced, became absolutely unprintable.

Big Medicine ate his dinner, watched Pink meditatively, grinned, and said nothing at all—and that in the face of insults and epithets that would make the ears of a dead man tingle, for Pink had a vocabulary to bring results once he was thoroughly aroused. Big Medicine sat and heard himself called a coward, a quitter, and a gabbling braggart who could do nothing but stretch his mouth to his ears. His personal imperfections were dwelt upon in a way that must have been humiliating, even to an insensitive man. But he would not get his gun, and he would not fight again with his fists. He would not make a move that would give Pink a chance at him.

For, when a man with a gun and a heart surging with the lust to kill faces one as Pink faced Big Medicine, there are but two things to do—fight and take a chance, or sit tight and say nothing, which is the only trail to a whole skin. Because no man who is sane and sober will deliberately shoot down another when that other is sitting quiet and unarmed before him.

Big Medicine ceased to smile, after the first five minutes, and that was the only visible effect Pink had upon him.

"Look here, now!" said Chip calmly at last, grabbing Pink by one quivering shoulder. "Sounds to me like you've said about all the occasion requires, Pink."

Pink twitched his shoulder loose, stuttered over a last biting epithet, and whirled on his heel. He went to the corral, where the horses were being held by the wrangler, and picked up his rope. He lurched a bit when he walked, so greatly did his anger possess him. The others followed silently, Big Medicine trailing behind them all.

Pink stepped over the rope that encircled the horses, made an uncertain throw at the first horse of his string that came near enough, missed, and snared instead a horse no man claimed —an "extra," too vicious to be worth much on the range. Why he was in the bunch at all no one seemed to know or care, except that he could, at a pinch, be ridden if one were willing to risk a broken bone or two.

Pink yanked the loop tight.

"I'll just *ride* yuh, now I've got yuh!" he muttered recklessly, with an oath, and led him, head up and eyes rolling protest, stiff-legged from the corral.

The Happy Family looked at him curiously, and Weary started well-meant remonstrance; but Pink only swore at Weary, and led the horse to where his saddle lay on its side.

Twelve feet away, Chip was yielding to a very human desire to take the conceit out of Bud Welch. Bud had sidled up to him, removed his cigarette from his lips, and grinned deprecatingly.

"Say could yuh manage to oblige me with a real *hoss* this time?" he had asked mildly.

Chip eyed him sidelong, said "Huh!" quite audibly, and pointed out The Weaver. "There's that blue roan you can have—only he's liable to take some *riding,*" he told him shortly.

"Much obliged," said Bud, and straddled the rope corral eagerly.

The Happy Family sent grateful glances toward Chip—glances which he chose not to see—and hurried their saddling so that they might see the fun when it began, and keep pace with it if it carried far afield. They almost forgot Pink, though Pink was having trouble with the beast he had chosen to inflict upon himself.

They all mounted and rode away from camp; and they did it so uneventfully that Patsy, gazing from the mess wagon, grunted disgust. Over the hill, however, there was another tale to be told.

Chip, with an eye to harmony, and believing that The Weaver was going to behave himself, after all, began to turn off his men almost at once. Big Medicine he sent with Weary, because he could trust Weary's tongue and temper. Pink was to ride circle, with Happy Jack for leader, because Happy, while he might grow purple and hoarse, would not seriously resent Pink's villainous mood, and villainous is the only word that properly describes Pink as he was then.

They started off like the spokes in a rudely shaped wheel, and rode leisurely, for the afternoon promised heat unbearable. A hundred yards, perhaps, they went, when Weary, obeying an impulse, looked back, then jerked his horse around.

"That brute—he'll kill him!" he cried sharply.

Across a little washout, Pink's horse was rearing and plunging wickedly, and Pink, still reckless because of his blind rage, was yanking and spurring spitefully.

The horse reared again, twisted in midair, and came down with a thud which they could hear plainly. In an instant he was up, and they saw Pink jerked sickeningly, one foot caught in the stirrup.

Big Medicine gave an inarticulate sort of bellow, whipped something out from under his trousers belt, and fired. The horse across the washout dropped like a leaden thing, and made no move, and the Happy Family, racing for the spot, freed Pink, unhurt save that his ankle was bruised and strained.

Pink felt dazedly for his hat, hopped upon one foot to a rock, and sat down, breathing unevenly.

"So help me Josephine—I believe he's going to ride him!" he said, in something like his normal tones, and they all looked to see where he pointed.

Across the washout The Weaver was gyrating, and in the saddle Big Medicine was waving his gun erratically, spurring occasionally and now and then firing a shot into the air. They watched him anxiously. The Weaver "weaved" his worst. Aslant he struck the ground, so that the stirrup of Big Medicine almost grazed the grass. Up he went, and came down slanting the other way. North he faced, and in the next jump faced south. Big Medicine shook the reins, and fired another shot.

It was some time before he rode over to where they were watching, and when he did he put the Weaver across the washout nonchalantly, and galloped up to them, grinning his wide grin.

"I was just learning this hoss that noise don't hurt to speak of," he explained loudly, and turned his pale, protruding gaze upon Pink.

Pink blushed, remembering the noise he had himself been making not so long ago—the noise that did not appear to "hurt to speak of."

"He's a right nice little hoss," went on Bud, still grinning, "only, if he stays in *my* string, he's got to git accustomed to the smell uh gun smoke, by cripes!"

"By golly," blurted Slim, speaking what lay heavy on the minds of the Happy Family, "I'd like to know if this here was an accident—this hundred-yard shot yuh made, and got him right in the only spot that'd drop him instant. By golly, *I* call it an *accident.*"

"Well, say—I ain't none accustomed to accidents—not with m' six-gun in m' fingers!" bellowed Big Medicine. "By cripes, where would the kid 'a' been by now if I *hadn't* stopped this hoss instant? Honest to grandma, even if he *is* a sassy little devil, I like him a heap. I couldn't ride off and watch him drug to death. By cripes, I just couldn't do it!" He glared around at them defiantly.

"I betche yuh couldn't do it ag'in, just the same!" croaked Happy Jack, his mind yet on the round hole just above the ear of the dead horse.

Big Medicine snorted, grinned amazingly, and rode close to Pink. "Say, kid, I hope yuh don't feel hard to-ward me yet," he said, leaning solicitously over the saddle horn. "I reelize I done a mean thing to yuh—but joshing is something I can't help; I go too far with it sometimes, and I know it." He stopped, and his pale, froglike eyes became actually wistful.

"I like yuh, kid—and if yuh consider I've done yuh any favor"—he jerked his thumb toward the stiffening heap of horseflesh—"yuh can more than square it by forgetting we ever had trouble."

The Happy Family, somewhat embarrassed by this frank exposure of a man's real self, turned and became very argumentative around the dead horse. So they did not see the faint quiver of Pink's lips when he reached up and shook hands with Big Medicine.

A REALLY SACRED FISH

IN Pelorus Sound, on the south side of the Cook Strait, which is situated between the north and south islands of New Zealand, lives one of the most remarkable fish in the world. Where he came from, or how long ago he was born, no one seems to know. But captains of vessels and voyagers tell curious stories of how for the last thirty years Pelorus Jack, as this fish has been named, has piloted for several miles each steamer which neared the sound.

Day or night appears to make no difference to him, for he is always to be depended upon to make his appearance; and those who pass frequently through the strait can tell almost accurately when he will show himself. His length is estimated at about sixteen feet; and, from the fact that he is of a light gray color and comes to the surface to blow, he has been called the "little white whale."

He has no companions—in fact, he seems to be an outcast of the fish world—and can be seen making straight for a steamer, when some distance away, on account of a large fin which shows about eighteen inches above the surface of the water. Many theories have been put forward as to why Pelorus Jack should make a practice of accompanying ships passing through the strait. The most likely of these surmises seems to be that he comes to the bow of each vessel to scrape the barnacles off himself, for he touches the ship as he darts about.

Pelorus Jack is the only fish in the world protected by act of parliament. In September, 1904, it was enacted that it should not be lawful for any person to catch the fish or mammal of the species known as Risso's dolphin in Cook Strait, under a penalty of not less than twenty-five and not more than five hundred dollars. There has never been any fish of this species seen in the strait except Pelorus Jack; so that the act of parliament was passed solely on his behalf.

Guy and Ghost, Psychic Detectives

By Lester Griswold

The spiritualistic medium, the clairvoyant, and so-called "fortune tellers" generally, obtain from their clients, in the course of business, much information that is really of value. Not a few charlatans have made use of information so obtained for their own nefarious uses; but there is no recorded instance of a man with the instincts of the detective taking up this line of work and using it as a means to the detection of crime. In this new series of complete short stories, one of which will appear every month, Mr. Lester Griswold has created a detective who is so incisive, so analytical, so human and genuine as to attract and interest you from the first.

I.—THE PERFUME OF THE POPPY

PROLOGUE.

THE BETTER BURGLARS.

AN official tin star glimmered as the broad blue-clad chest of its wearer halted beneath a lamp-post; and two slouch-hatted, tennis-shoed gentlemen sheered off like storm-hounded ships that sight a beacon-marked reef, and sped on up Eighth Avenue, hardly distinguishable, and noiseless in their rubber-soled shoes.

Emerging on Forty-second Street, the small man, known to the profession as "Cat-eye," designated, by grunt and gesture, a row of old-fashioned houses set deep in the rear of what once might have been gardens.

"It's the fourth from this end," he remarked. "We'd better dog it down the alley here."

It was after midnight, the fashionable hour among gentlemen of their kidney for investigating the contents of residences to which they had no door keys. Cat-eye had located the present "front" through his friendship with a guard on the Sixth Avenue elevated line, with whom he lounged and talked when he had no other pressing business.

For several nights he had noticed a man take the uptown train between the hours of half past six and seven—a very well-groomed young gentleman who, when reaching for his fare, generally fished up a roll of yellow-backs that made Cat-eye faint with emotion.

He had followed this plutocrat uptown, and had waited for him outside the door of a man well known as a magnate and a city father; had returned on the same train with him, and had watched him enter the Forty-second Street house.

Cat-eye had never gone up to the garden gate; for a Hibernian gentleman named Casey busied himself on that beat, and Cat-eye knew him too well. Nor had he ever seen the house by daylight; but he had located it by the alley behind, and had seen the well-groomed young gentleman light the gas in the second story back for a number of nights.

But Cat-eye, while a tireless investigator, was not given to deeds of valor; hence the impression of his companion, "The Ferret," into the enterprise.

"Now, my idea is this," he had said,

several hours before, in McGuirk's saloon; "there ain't nobuddy else livin' there, and we kin get in easy while he's out. Then all we gotta do is wait fer him and stick him up in his own hallway. Ain't no chance to be seen that way, and, if he sh'u'd get hysterical and make a fight, we could roll around on th' floor all night 'thout anybuddy thinkin' it was anything but a family row."

As The Ferret had but a few moments before declared that, for eight dollars in real money, he would undertake to capture Fort Hamilton with a bean-shooter, it had not been difficult to persuade him to come; and now, making a wide circle around the corner lamp-post, they were soon in the alley, picking their way among empty cans and other popular débris. On his last visit to this locality, Cat-eye had, with remarkable forethought, branded the position from which he had made his ascent to the top of the wall. The rear of the house showed only a black and menacing blur in the driving sleet; and, as Cat-eye located the nail which he had thoughtfully inserted into the mortar, The Ferret could not withhold a word of approval.

"Don't see how yeh thought teh do it. Jest luck, I guess."

In reply, Cat-eye dwelt touchingly on that special ability which he knew himself to possess, prophesying its early recognition by the profession. Then, by the aid of the ivy vines which had been trustingly developed with great pains by the owner of the house, both were soon up and over the wall, wading about in the mud of the back yard. The back windows were all plainly visible now, and silently Cat-eye designated the room from which the light shone every night.

"He ain't in yet. We're in time, all right. Let's get to work."

The tone implied that he, too, intended to strive for an immediate entrance; but The Ferret was not misled by any hope of assistance, and swung up to the little porch, leaving his companion to follow at the leisure which such moments inspired in him.

The window, a long, old-fashioned one, was sprung with as little resistance as though it had been hospitably opened from the inside. Listening a moment to assure himself that the slight creak of the prying jimmy had aroused no unexpected occupant, The Ferret whistled softly for his companion; and the two entered, cautiously closing the window behind them.

"This opens into a little pantry on the side. That's where the back door is," whispered Cat-eye tremulously. "Fix the getaway, will yeh? I'll stay here by the winda and listen."

The preparing of "getaways," that most important precaution, along with any other portions of the mission that implied hazard, The Ferret had known to be his from the outset; and the suggestion was carried out with no argument from him. Returning to his companion's side, he bade him accompany him for further exploration of the premises.

"Aw, what's the use?" replied Cat-eye, simulating a languor that he was far from feeling. "Let's jest find th' front hall and wait in here till we hear him come in."

"If there's anybody upstairs, I wanta know it," replied The Ferret coldly. "Be fine t' meet this guy in th' hall with a house full of people t' shoot down at yeh!"

"Well—I'll look round down here, and you do th' same upstairs," compromised Cat-eye, and, with no further comment, they separated.

At first, it did not seem that Cat-eye was consumed with any enthusiasm of investigation, for a great blotch of heated breath on the window pane showed that his longing gaze had been directed outward; but, presently, stimulated by a certainty of information expected, he groped haltingly around the room, and found that it was shut off from the front chamber by a pair of folding doors, bolted on the other side. Pleased with this limitation, he continued his course to another wall. This he found blank, with the exception of an old-fashioned mantelpiece against which he came to a satisfied halt.

He lighted a match, shading it with both hands. In the glow of the tiny escaping ray, the furnishings of the room were for an instant clearly visible —a long centre table, a score of chairs. An opposite wall, draped with heavy curtains, served as a sombre background for the old-fashioned gilt chandelier that marked the centre of the ceiling. For such a large room, it was peculiarly bare of decoration, and the long table reminded him of an undertaker's shop.

"Guess it's a boardin' house—with all them chairs," he said bravely.

Nevertheless, the warning hiss indicating The Ferret's return held peculiar harmony for him.

"Empty as a church," was that worthy's cheerful communication.

"Sssh!" warned Cat-eye, clutching his arm.

The Ferret had heard the footsteps, too, and did not need the caution. He allowed Cat-eye to drag him across the room and behind the heavy curtains; for there seemed to be no time in which to gain the hall, where they would have the advantage of the newcomer's preoccupation in closing the door behind him. Then, to their consternation, they heard voices as two men entered the hall.

After the first formalities, in which it was evident that one of them was the host, an approaching voice came distinctly to The Ferret and his companion.

"Right in here, sir—right in here. You must be alone for a moment, and darkness is reassuring to those we wish to interview. Concentrate your mind on the one thought, and we will try."

Some one came in through the little pantry door; a chair groaned, and all was still again. The strained ears of the men behind the curtains seemed to catch faint whispering, as the front door opened and closed once more.

Something about the mustiness of the house, and the mysterious threat of the conversation, suggested to the men in hiding that the open air would be very stimulating. But the position of the other occupant of the room was utterly unknown to them; and, in absence of information concerning his size and quantity of armament, they remained motionless, their eyes longingly wandering to the gray blotch of the window.

Even this was soon denied them. Silently, the gray blotch vanished, and all was black. Simultaneously, they heard the faint sliding of doors; and, although they had no knowledge of his entrance, the voice of the man who had spoken before came, in melancholy tones, from the rear of the room.

"The Indian girl was murdered—foully murdered."

This in itself conveyed little information, but much fear. With painstaking exactitude, The Ferret removed each scratching digit of Cat-eye's hand from his smarting wrist.

"But for this hellish crime," intoned the speaker sepulchrally, "by which the grave won her with her sins upon her soul, the power of evil over which I have control could not send her at my summons. As it is—I command thee, Sathanas, to dispatch speedily to me the spirit of Little-Flower-in-the-Wood!"

A brittle rustling in the air caused both men to look from behind the curtain, wild-eyed.

A luminous form glided through the room. Neither face nor head was visible, but a feathery headdress suggested that the voice had not called in vain upon Little Flower-in-the-Wood.

The fingers of Cat-eye had again sought the reassuring touch of his companion's flesh, and were punishingly imbedded. But, somehow, the attitude of The Ferret had changed, and he seemed to welcome the physical pain.

The elusive figure was gone from their view almost instantly, and now the same voice testified that it had arrived to do his bidding.

"There is one here, Little-Flower-in-the-Wood, who is sorely beset."

A longing to declare himself as the one designated possessed Cat-eye; only a lack of breath prohibited his voicing of the desire.

"Years ago, he incurred the enmity of one who he was later led to believe had 'crossed over.' But to-day he has

seen him in the flesh. This man is a man of blood, and the one who sits within sound of my voice fears for his life. Do you see danger in store for him?"

A small voice, strainedly feminine, broke into dolorous wailings. A chair grated along the floor.

"I see a man," announced the wailing voice; "maybe a foreigner, or perhaps one long removed from his mother country. He looks more than his age. He now stands enwrapped in an overcoat—a long and heavy overcoat—on a certain street corner. Yes, yes, I have it—I have it! I see a large building by him. Ah! The large building is in a city—this city! It is all clear to me. He plots! He looks about him, as though searching for some one. Now his hand clasps a long knife. He tests its point and smiles—cruelly!"

Again the chair grated. The description, while not long, seemed to have cost the spirit considerable of its energy; for the voice trailed off into inarticulate moans.

"I must go! I must go! I fear these deeds of violence! Oh, let the man this foreigner plots against clear his soul of sin before his hour comes! I go—I go!"

"She is weak," came in the man's tones. "She has come from afar at my summons. Go to what rest you can, Little-Flower-in-the-Wood!"

The swish of soft fabric tearing rapidly through the air, and a blur of luminous garment, showed that she remembered accurately the path by which she had come.

"You have heard?" demanded the master's voice.

"Save me—save me!" cried some one, in an ecstasy of terror.

"The spirits of evil will not work against their own," droned the master. "It is beyond my power to compel them."

These were terrible words, and the invisible audience in the chair gave vent to his terror in pitiful gasps. But no such privilege was accorded the malefactors behind the curtain, who were now clutching one another with mutual satisfaction. The Ferret's lips were trembling with some whispered communication when the droning tones again broke the silence.

"Ah—I hear voices!"

The Ferret's lips remained in the position of one about to whisper, and so continued for some time.

"Ah—they are silent again. But they draw closer; they draw closer."

Suddenly the whole room shook, as a colorless burst of vivid light filled every nook and corner yet revealed nothing, leaving its imprint on the retinas of the eyes which looked upon it, long after it had gone out. Immediately the room resounded with many voices, pitched in widely different keys.

Cold perspiration ran into the eyes of The Ferret, the sting of it a diversion rather than an annoyance. He would it had blinded him rather than let him see the giant figure that slowly descended from the ceiling in a pillar of light. Cat-eye squeaked feebly, but luckily the great apparition had burst into speech.

"Man of wickedness," it boomed, "you who seek to escape the punishment of your evil deeds, know that no power of evil can save you! Yet am I touched by your misery! If I am the instrument of saving you, what good deed will you do in return?"

"Anything—anything!" wailed the suppliant.

"Your path has been easy," continued the vibrant voice. "You have forgotten those whose bare and bleeding feet tread the rocks. Only the helping of your fellow man will influence me in your behalf."

Evidently this seemed vague to the voice that had been presiding; for the apparition was rudely interrupted.

"It means—will you give to the poor?"

An eager and tremulous affirmative came in reply.

"Then," proceeded the shrouded figure, "give now to this worthy man, that he may fulfill my wishes judiciously. Give all you have, lest I repent my decision to help you!"

There was a sound of footsteps, another grate of the chair, and a rustle of

many bills crushed hurriedly against something. Immediately the apparition raised gauze-draped hands into the great white light, and muttered dramatically:

"My spell is on the man at the street corner. He cannot see; he cannot hear! He staggers helplessly into the street. An automobile is coming! It is going to stop at the curb. Ah! The driver changes his mind, and again speeds on. He is close upon the man in the street—closer, closer—closer—— Ah!"

A wild scream, in another voice, came as though from a great distance, and with it absolute darkness.

For some time the curtains had stood manfully against the terrible strain; but, at this bloodcurdling dénouement, the weight upon them was too strong, and, amid a clatter of curtain poles, the two uninvited guests fell limply to the floor.

The commotion was not great, considering what had gone before in that haunted chamber; but it affected singularly the master of the powers of evil, who had looked on complacently at all the other terrors. His voice was dubious as he commanded:

"I call no more. I command silence."

Both The Ferret and Cat-eye were now bellowing lustily for the police; but so enwrapped were they in the folds of the curtain that the result was as muffled and diabolical as any of the sounds which had reduced them to their pitiable state.

"They're hard to stop once they get started," said the master voice; but he spoke without conviction, and ushered forth the paying guest with as much celerity as his trembling limbs would permit. "Their torments are heavy upon them. You must go quickly, and leave me to settle with them."

He had him into the vestibule by this time, and closed the front door hurriedly between them.

"Help—police!" bawled the two, rolling free of the curtains, their sufferings hideous at the thought that the only other human had gone from among them.

Instantly the room was filled with light from so commonplace a source as some electric bulbs high up on the wainscoting. But both The Ferret and Cat-eye had their eyes firmly closed, and their determination was to keep them closed until they felt the comparatively friendly touch of the law, to which they still frantically appealed for assistance.

The Ferret was the first to repent of his decision, having been reassured by a heavy kick between the shoulders, and by a threat that, if he did not cease his outcries, his cold-blooded murder would promptly ensue. In dim surprise that a denizen of the spirit realm could kick so realistically and couch his threat in speech familiar to the world in which The Ferret belonged, that worthy opened timorous eyes, to behold a well-groomed young wraith, adequately reinforced by another, bare-armed and muscular, a gauze hood thrown back from his head.

Strong in the belief that he had recently died, The Ferret felt impelled to ask, purely from morbid curiosity, what manner of sudden death had ensnared him; but the upheaval of laughter from the bare-armed materialization was too human in its reality.

"For the Lord's sake, Guy—look at 'em!" gasped the muscular young man.

His well-groomed companion frowned severely upon the trembling pair.

"You're a brave-looking couple, jimmying your way in here—now, aren't you?" he inquired, endeavoring to keep his voice level. "And, just because we're not sitting around to greet you with a lot of port wine and cake, you start screeching for the police. If you're burglars, you'd better make a specialty of babies' banks. You couldn't steal a handful of water out of the East River without an icicle down your backs. Oh, put 'em out, Corny—put 'em out! See if you can make a dent in the pavement with this fellow's head."

Cat-eye, fortunately for him, regained consciousness at this juncture, and, seeing in the circle of eyes about him the welcome light of scorn rather

than that of retribution, followed the one addressed as Corny on his hands and knees, until a well-directed kick sent him through the front door on an aërial flight terminated by the pavement, where The Ferret was rubbing the indentation the lead-piping had left in his hip.

From where they crouched, the light from the front room of the house shone on the gilt letters of a sign:

GUY and GHOST
Psychic Detectives
Materializations at any hour of the day or night a specialty

I.

THE PERFUME OF THE POPPY.

The big Forty-second Street restaurant was dubiously honored by the man who stood with his back to it. He was watching an electric sign in the next block with an air which mingled possession and much fear—such an air as the owner of four untamed leopards might have.

One of the proprietors of the big restaurant took alarm at the man's air, and, instead of stepping from his hansom to his restaurant, approached the watcher cordially, but with hate in his heart, inviting him to wine and dine at the expense of the "house," adding something about vintage wines. For he knew his man full well, and had misgivings concerning the legality of private dining rooms in connection with the rights granted a restauranteur.

"Naw! I'm after that grafter over there!"

The watcher's speech did not seem to warrant the care the manicure had bestowed upon his hands. But his air did not cloud the atmosphere, or prevent the electric sign from winking wickedly at him.

DO YOU FEAR EVIL?
GUY and GHOST
WILL PROTECT YOU

"Oh, Guy Keels is all right." The restauranteur was relieved enough to extenuate others. "Sure, he's all right. He comes over here every night; and a nicer, squarer fellow——"

"He's a bum grafter!" snarled the watcher. "And that sign'll come down to-morra!" He paused, weighing the exact time it took to cut a law to fit any given case. "By Monday night, sure. Watch it!"

The sign, undisturbed, became more informative.

CRIME PUNISHED!
The Malefactor Fears
GUY and GHOST
Psychic Detectives

"A—ah! Does he?" growled the watcher; and off he went down the street, before further misgivings should assail him.

The house which the sign ornamented was one of a block set deep within gardens, and with overhanging porch fronts. The sign had been recently installed. Hitherto "Guy and Ghost" had contented themselves with advertising in the newspapers, and with an ordinary black and gilt board, announcing their claims.

A servant in dark red livery led the visitor to a rear room, hung in red, containing a long table, many chairs, and a writing desk, where, under a drop light covered with crimson glass, sat a young man in a tunic of scarlet silk.

"Where's Guy?" demanded the visitor.

The young gentleman looked up lazily.

"He is in astral communication with the Shah of Persia," was his drawling reply. "After which he's got to give King Leopold some advice about affairs in the Congo. So, unless your business is very, very pressing, I'd hate to put those two monarchs out."

"Have you got the crust to josh with me?"

The visitor's face had now a hue in common with the young gentleman's tunic.

The wearer of this garment, however, did not lift his eyes, continuing lazily:

"Besides, there's no necessity for you to see Guy. I'm only a young psychic, but I know what your trouble is. It is a razor trouble. The razor is dull. Also, it is a whisker trouble. The whiskers are tough. My influence—which is always hovering about whispering things to me—tells me that you should give the ninety-eight cent safety razor you use to the janitor you most dislike, and purchase one of the five-dollar variety. There is no charge for the advice. Good night."

Rubbing his bristly cheeks and heavy jaw, the visitor struggled vainly for words.

His accents now dreamy, the young man resumed his monologue:

"You'll have to excuse me, now. My influence warns me that the police are getting jealous because Guy and Ghost are doing a good business and don't pay them a big rake-off. It says it wants to tell me how to set them on their ear, but there is a disturbing element——"

The visitor crossed the room hurriedly, and opened the door. The atmosphere outside, unfreighted with mysticism, seemed to give him courage.

"I come here to do you a good turn," he said, in reproachful anger. "*And* you get fresh! All right, you mutt! See if you get so fresh with the chief. And the gang of you easy-money takers better be down at Three Hundred Mulberry to-morra—that's all I got to say!"

He considered it best to say it on the outside, and to close the door immediately afterward.

The young gentleman smiled, and whistled softly. In response, another young gentleman entered, seemingly through the wall, but really by means of a panel that slid upward and permitted one to walk beneath it. The second young gentleman wore a huge paste diamond star bound about his forehead, and trailed a heavy red velvet robe behind him. He hitched it up as he sat down, revealing beneath it polished boots of tan leather, and blue serge trousers turned up.

This was Guy Keels, originator and half owner, with Mr. Cornelius Wraye—the other young gentleman—of the highly prosperous firm of Guy and Ghost, Psychic Detectives. A certain imaginative genius had always distinguished Mr. Keels. He could find more reasons for a person doing any given thing than any other man on earth, and some one of the reasons generally turned out to be the correct one.

The procedure of Guy and Ghost was simple. Mr. Keels claimed to have influence over one Monsieur Guillaume, once a French prefect of police. Guillaume, finding life beyond the grave tedious, consented to unravel for his friend, Mr. Keels, any peculiar cases that interested him. Mr. Keels could not, of course, guarantee Monsieur Guillaume's interest. But in that case he handed back his client's money.

He was not a charlatan, even though the introduction of the ghost, the velvet robe, and the diamond star seemed to smack of a quack's procedure. If the business on which he was consulted lay within his grasp, he told the seeker after information what he or she wanted to know. He undertook nothing that was not perfectly honest. If he failed, there was no charge. Who can blame him for using methods that gave him free advertisement—methods which he regarded as a competent theatrical manager would his stage accessories?

A week before, he had been approached by certain representatives of the political organization in power, and informed that the existing laws permitted the police to close him up on the ground of obtaining money under false pretenses. But, if he had a friend at court——

Mr. Keels did not take kindly to the suggestion. Therefore, the call from the man with the bristly cheeks and the heavy jaw, to whose conversation, and that of Mr. Cornelius Wraye, Guy Keels had been listening from behind the panel.

"There's only one thing to do, Corny," was his remark, as he unhitched the velvet robe and tossed it across a chair, throwing after it the strip of red velvet that supported the

diamond star. He now stood, a remarkably well-dressed young American, in a suit of blue serge, a striped necktie, and a pearl pin. His appearance was unremarkable, but his eyes warranted more than cursory attention; they were shaped like an Oriental's, and were of a peculiar tawny hue. People who had displeased him found them entirely too passionless and calculating.

"No rake-off?"

"Should say not. The Ghost has got to render the community some startling service. Then space in the newspapers about the benefit of a guardian from beyond the grave. Police'll be afraid to touch us, then. I'm going down the street and have something to eat. Also to think. I'll send your dinner over. S'long."

He thrust his hands into his jacket pockets, and went out, shoulders bent over, chin up, eyes staring into those of passers-by, who found them uncomfortable.

In the big restaurant, the proprietor accosted him.

"He says he'll have that sign of yours down by Monday," was the concluding portion of his remarks.

Guy Keels nodded his thanks, and went on eating. The news did not seem to prevent him from making an excellent dinner; and when he sauntered out of the restaurant, smoking easily, the restauranteur spoke to his partner.

"They'll have to go some to beat Guy Keels. He's got something good on."

As a matter of fact, Guy Keels had not; but he held the police in wholesome contempt, and did not consider that it would be difficult to achieve results where they had failed. Heretofore he had declined many criminal cases, because they seemed to infringe on police business; he had even gone so far as to telephone tips to that very Three Hundred Mulberry to which he was summoned on the morrow. Clients came into his office at the rate of a hundred a day. If a criminal case of some moment was not in some way concerned with one of these, his experience was at fault.

But he had little idea that the case was so soon to be presented to him. As a matter of fact, it was already in his hands, although, to the average intelligence, the visit of the old lady with the lace mitts would have meant nothing. It had appealed to Corny Wraye in this negative way; for on Guy's return he spoke of it as a matter of little moment.

"Yes, a fool old girl," Corny had replied, in answer to Guy's inquiry if any one had called. "Somebody's been fishing off her window sill with a line and a hook, and she thinks the bogy man is after her."

"What've they been fishing?" asked Guy Keels, as he drew off his gloves and prepared to take a few notes on the little celluloid memorandum that he kept in a concealed pocket just inside his sleeve.

"Well, here's the dope," returned Mr. Wraye, passing over a red leather book in which were entered the various facts gleaned from possible clients.

MALVINIA G. WEEKS. Probably 50 to 55, pensioned by a brother in Wall Street. Ultrascientist, with a leaning toward spiritualism; and takes some interest in the esoteric, although she is inclined to think some of the tenets a bit sacrilegious.

"Oh, she's one of the usual people with no interest in life; one of those who have to manufacture romance for themselves. Well, there's not much in that." Guy threw the book back to Corny Wraye.

"We can't bother much with her kind," he added. "They're always good for pin money, if you tell 'em what they want you to tell 'em; but we've got more serious things to think about. Besides, we can't be square with that kind, and we're not going to be anything else with any one."

"I told her I didn't think you could take her case," said Mr. Wraye. "It seemed a shame to rob the poor old lady of the usual twenty-five, when the case looked dead simple. I stalled her off. Don't believe she'll be back again. Probably went to her favorite spiritualist. She was afraid to go back home."

"If you're determined to tell me the

story," said Guy Keels irritably, "go ahead!"

"Oh, no," replied Corny. "It was just a case of imagination. Somebody's been stealing her olive oil. She puts the bottle on her window sill each night, and it is generally empty in the morning. To-night, she was putting out the lights—she goes to bed early—when she happened to go into the pantry, and saw the olive oil fly into space. When she recovered consciousness, the bottle was back again, minus three-fourths of its contents. Up to this time, she had thought her servant was stealing it, and had fought with the girl three or four times. The thing's been going on for two weeks, now."

He noticed Guy Keels sit forward, with an attentive look in his eyes. Corny never questioned this look. He had seen it appear when the most trivial things were discussed, and never without good reason.

"Does she ever keep anything else on her window sill besides olive oil?" asked Guy monotonously.

"Why, sure. She mentioned, as a curious thing, that nothing ever disappeared *except* the olive oil."

"That's good," said Guy Keels. "Now, where did you say this woman lived?"

"In the Bramblecom—that's a half block of apartments opposite Central Park. Very expensive. East Side. People with just enough money to be on the fringe of society, and who are willing to pay for name and location. See something in it, Guy?"

"I'm going up there, ain't I?" was Mr. Keels' reply.

"But it's dead simple," persisted Corny, who often made Guy declare himself by persistent obtuseness. "Somebody's been playing a joke on the old lady. It's dead simple to fish for things off other people's window sills. A good hook and a ball of twine."

"You said this had been going on for several weeks," reminded Guy softly. "A person gets tired of that sort of joke. And, besides, why always olive oil? Think that over to yourself for a while, and maybe you'll smell the same kind of a mouse that I do. And, in case it so happens, make a noise like a piece of cheese. That's no more silent than a stone; but still—it'll do."

With which mysterious adjuration, he passed to the door, adding curtly that Corny could close the office, if he liked.

Alone, Mr. Keels entered a passing taxicab, and drove to the Bramblecom. Arrived there, he earnestly desired a plan of the house from the management; also a list of the tenants. After the expenditure of several dollars in tips to minor members of the staff, he procured what he wished and, picking out the quietest saloon near Fifty-ninth Street, entered the back room, gave the waiter half a dollar, ordered a drink, and requested to be left alone.

He found from the plan that the pantry of Miss Weeks' apartment faced a court twenty feet wide. This precluded a line being thrown from across the court, and left under suspicion only the five apartments directly above her. These were occupied, he found from the list, by James W. Thornton, Alvin Austin, Jeannette Hunt, E. J. Cuthbert, and Heaslip Donegal.

The taxicab was waiting for him. He entered it again, and drove swiftly back to his office, where he pulled down a social register, Bradstreet's, and other handy works of reference. Heaslip Donegal and Jeannette Hunt figured in one of the latter; the first a distinguished civil engineer, the second a miniature painter of some renown. Cuthbert he found in Bradstreet's, rated at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the junior partner in a brokerage firm; while James Wellington Thornton, third—whose address was given as the Brimblecom—turned out to be the son of Jimmy Thornton, a noted cotillion leader, who had married the heiress of a Nevada silver king.

None of the books, however, gave any information about Mr. Alvin Austin, whose apartment was directly above that of Miss Weeks. Yet, strangely enough, this was the only name of the five that sounded reminiscently in the ears of Mr. Keels when he repeated it.

Returning to the taxicab, he bade the driver take him to the office of the *Messenger,* the greatest of daily papers.

The boy in buttons took his name in to the night city editor, who bore him a warm friendship; and the man in shirt sleeves arose from his desk and demanded a story from him.

"It's you to help me, Bob," was Guy Keels' reply. "It looks like the police are going to make a good try at closing me up, and I'm fighting for my life. Now, if I nail this story, you'll have first crack at it, believe me. Meanwhile, I want to look through your morgue."

The newspaper man asked no further questions, but led his friend into the room where the file cases stood. A newspaper file, commonly known as "the morgue," is a record of all who have figured, even infinitesimally, in the public eye; and, outside that of a San Francisco journal, the room in which Guy now stood was supposed to contain more damaging statements against citizens of the world than did any other.

"Now, Bob," said Guy Keels, in a low tone, "don't start to look up anything about the man I'm trying to locate, because you might put somebody else on the scent and queer me. Promise? Well, then, the name's Alvin Austin."

Bob looked it up himself, and returned with a stony face.

"There's nothing doing, old man," he said. "Sorry."

For the moment, Guy Keels felt inclined to give up his task; but the cool air of night set him to scheming again, and soon he was back at the Bramblecom, disbursing small change, until he stood alone in the deserted hall outside the apartment lettered "K," which was the residence of Mr. Alvin Austin.

His actions were peculiar. He seemed to be smelling for something. He smelt at the keyhole; he got down on hands and knees, and smelt at the bottom of the door. Then he struck a match on his trousers, and held it close to the keyhole; after which a smile of satisfaction came to his face, and he poked gingerly into the keyhole with the point of a thin pencil.

The pencil touched something that moved. Guy Keels arose, well pleased, and, taking the elevator boy aside, gave him the sight of a five-dollar bill.

"Now, I want to know all you know about Mr. Alvin Austin," was his slowly spoken introduction, as his hand hid the note from sight.

"Mr. Austin—why, he's closed his apartment for the winter. He's in New Mexico, he is."

"Oh—in New Mexico? Whereabouts?"

"Alby-something. I can get the address from the desk, if you want it. His lungs went to the bad. He's——"

"Then nobody's living in his apartment. Is that it?"

"Sure. It's been closed since the day he left it."

"Doesn't he want to sublet it?"

"Who? Mr. Austin? He wouldn't sublet to nobody. He's got it full of glass and chiny and paintings and tapestries, and everything like that. It's the biggest apartment in the place. He uses it for a kind of a showroom. The insurance on the things he's got costs more'n the 'partment does. One of the maids was telling me——"

"Ah—yes—yes!"

Guy Keels remembered suddenly where he had seen the name. It had been attached to an advertisement of Persian rugs and Bohemian glassware, especially imported. The advertisement appeared only in society papers and was barely more than a notice; but, as Guy Keels took all such papers and read them carefully, the name had remained in his memory.

"How long has he been here?"

"Why, before my time. He's one of the oldest tenants in the house. I can find out, if you want me to."

"No. That's all right. How long has he been threatened with consumption?"

"Well, I've been here three years, and he's gone away every December and stayed away until April. He has things on show from October to November, and from April to June. A lot

of stuff come for him only the other day, from somewhere in Yurrup—I forget the name of the place."

"Have the things been stored in his room?"

"Not much. Mr. Austin wouldn't let anybody in those apartments while he's away. One of the boys broke a big vase of his once, one that Mrs. Van Astorfeldt had just bought. Three thousand bucks, it was. Gee!"

"Then pretty nearly everybody knows that Mr. Austin never uses the apartment from December to April, eh?"

"I guess his friends do—that is, they and the people who do business with him."

"And you say nobody's allowed in the apartment?"

"I told you that once, sir. But—look here, what's all this about, anyway?"

Guy Keels took out his watch. It was near twelve o'clock. He glanced over at the boy who operated the switchboard, then back at the elevator boy.

"Do they keep two of you on at night?" he asked. "That is, after one o'clock?"

"No, sir; not on this side of the house. There are only ten apartments to look after over here, and I run the elevator and the switchboard, both."

"Well, I'll be back at one," said Guy Keels.

His next stop was at a certain club on Forty-fourth Street, where he was tolerably sure of finding Corny Wraye. Him he took by the arm, and led back to the Forty-second Street offices, speaking no word the while. They passed into the sanctum, a place ingeniously fitted with "spirit" wires, slate-writing apparatus, "cabinet lights," and sliding panels.

"We've hit it, Corny, I think," he said, as he consulted the files and took down a sheaf of newspapers marked, in blue pencil, "The Donchian Murder." These he tossed to Corny Wraye.

"What!" gasped that young gentleman. "You're on that sport's trail?"

"Corny," returned Mr. Keels seriously, "if the murderer of Ames Donchian is not in the Tombs to-night, to-morrow we shut up shop. Go out and buy some chloroform, a big sponge, and a blackjack. There are nefarious doings on."

"But——" began Mr. Wraye.

Guy waved him off, and began to peruse the data of the Donchian murder.

It was a crime which had no halo of mystery about it. The facts were plain enough. Ames Donchian was a peculiar millionaire who lived in a great house on Madison Avenue near the Gardens. He was profoundly suspicious, and trusted no one except his valet, Desmond Healy; in fact, he would have no other servants in the house. Healy received a tremendous wage, dressed like a gentleman, and was a conspicuous figure in the Tenderloin. No one knew him for Donchian's servant; for Donchian had long since ceased to know any one. The Donchian residence was a treasure house of quaint jewels, priceless carpets, marvelous laces—everything that was old and expensive. The millionaire was in his dotage, and he played with his precious art objects like a child with toys.

Healy was never seen until the night life was at its gayest—around two or three o'clock in the morning. He was a night-bird, and a spender. He wasted money in all the big restaurants and gaming houses; but, no matter what was on, he disappeared promptly at five o'clock in the morning—where to, no one knew. But, as he always paid and asked for no credit, questions were never asked. New York is full of such mysterious persons.

Finally he became enamored of a certain musical comedy star. He lavished jewels on her, and denied her nothing, because he wanted her to marry him. Believing that she loved him, he confessed the truth; he told her that he was Donchian's right hand, that he had been robbing the dotard from the time he entered his service, and that he had saved a small fortune—the whole of which, however, had disappeared since he met her, his inamorata. He announced his purpose of getting old Donchian to make a will in his favor, and then of killing him by means of a

poison so subtle that the coroner would ascribe death to natural causes.

Healy made his mistake in confessing. The woman did not love him—she hated him with that peculiar hatred which a woman has for the man who demands the pretense of love from her, when she is too weak to resist the desire for the beautiful things that can be purchased with his money.

But she was in love with somebody else—a young newspaper reporter. She waited until the night when Healy had planned Donchian's murder, and then sent the boy to warn the millionaire. The old man turned on Healy, in the boy's presence, with an upraised knife. Healy shot him dead, wounded the newspaper man, laid hands on everything of value that was portable, and escaped. But he, too, was wounded.

In half an hour his description was in the hands of the police, and the story gave the great newspaper on which the boy was employed the excuse for an extra—a rare thing with them. Yet, notwithstanding that Healy was known to every Tenderloin rounder, that the chiefs of police in every large city and most small ones had shown his picture to their subordinates, and that it had been published wherever the news agencies have subscriptions, Desmond Healy was still at large.

Guy Keels had been interested in the case, as he was in all criminal affairs; and one of the smallest points in the career of Healy had put him upon a scent that he believed to be the true one.

At five minutes after one, in a closed motor cab, he was back at the Bramblecom, where the boy waited at the switchboard. Guy took a roll of yellow bills from his pocket. Stripping off the top one, he laid it on the switchboard.

"There's another like that if we pull this off successfully," he said. "And more, if everything turns out as I expect."

"Mind, I'm not going to lose my job," warned the boy, glancing uneasily at the features of Cornelius Wraye, to make sure that criminal intent did not lurk behind them.

"All you've got to do, my boy," was Guy Keels' reassurance, "is to connect yourself with Mr. Alvin Austin's apartment and turn in an alarm of fire. Act like it's a general alarm and you've got two or three parties on the wire. My friend here will have this desk telephone in his hand, and will answer you excitedly. You'll say: 'Fire—fire! Is that you, Mr. Thornton?' He'll say: 'Yes—what the devil's the matter?' You'll say: 'Fire in the elevator shaft. For God's sake, get on the fire escape! There ain't a chance. I've had an awful time waking you up!' He'll thank you in great excitement, and close down. But you don't want to begin talking until you hear somebody take the receiver off the hook. That'll be the fellow in Mr. Austin's apartment."

"But there ain't anybody in that apartment, I told you."

"I know what you told me. I'm paying you to do what I tell *you* to do. And I'm paying you well. All you've got to do is to call up a supposedly empty apartment. Of course, the fellow up there won't answer you; but he'll take the receiver off the hook and listen to what you've got to say; and, if he thinks the place is on fire, you bet your life he'll run out. See?"

"All right, sir," said the boy doubtfully. "I'll do it. But if I lose my job——"

"I'll take care of you. Don't worry!"

He gave the boy another sight of the roll of yellow-backs, and replaced it in his pocket.

"Meanwhile," he said grimly, "I'll be at the bottom of the fire escape. Where is it?"

The boy led the way to the courtyard. The court was dark, save for an occasional glimmer from a bathroom. The fire escape extended to within five feet of the ground. Guy Keels crouched in its shadow, the sponge soaked with chloroform in his hand.

He had not long to wait. Presently a window was flung up hastily, and he heard a foot scrape along the irons. Now came the patter of descending footsteps, and presently something cut through the dark.

Immediately Guy's hands went before him; the sponge was pressed tightly against the nostrils of the man in the dark; and a struggle, desperate and silent, began. But Guy's muscles were nerved for it, and, besides, the fumes of the chloroform slowly overcame the other. Their near presence affected even Guy; and he was very weak when the senseless body of his opponent slid along the pavement.

Guy knelt over him for some time, keeping the sponge in place, fearful lest the man might be shamming. Presently Corny Wraye joined him, and, after further rewarding and warning the boy, who was staring aghast, they carried out of the Bramblecom the limp body of the man who had tenanted an apartment not his own.

The night city editor himself accompanied the reporter who had received the original Healy story from the musical comedy star, and who had been wounded by the valet of the old millionaire. They were met by Corny Wraye, whose face was pale as he caught their hands.

"Did you telephone that Guy was on the track of Healy?" asked the night city editor breathlessly. "We're holding the news-stand edition. Is this the bunk, or what?"

"Have you got a couple of policemen with you?" demanded Corny.

"Sure; they're outside in the hall! What's doing?"

"Call 'em in!" said Mr. Wraye.

In response, the guardians of the law—one in citizen's clothes, the other a "harness bull"—came tiptoeing into the reception room.

"Gentlemen," said Corny Wraye, "there have been many sneers cast upon our claims. We have determined that the time has come to render the public a great service. It comes through a very small case entrusted to us. Hitherto, we have not bothered ourselves to do the work of the police for them. But Guy's influence now possesses him with information you have long sought for. We are about to attempt a difficult thing—the materialization of a living person, the call of the mind being proven stronger than that of the flesh. If you do not believe, do not enter!"

He pinched the arm of the night city editor reassuringly. The reporter did not look up. The two policemen were plainly afraid.

Wraye slid the panel back.

"Listen!" he commanded, in a thrilling whisper.

The room was filled with colorless light that blinded but revealed nothing. Corny Wraye tiptoed off in soft-soled shoes, and left the four spectators alone in the glaring white.

"I see a man," came a sepulchral voice, from somewhere in front of them. "He has many crimes upon his soul. I haunt him—I haunt him continually. He lights the little lamp on the floor; he takes out a long bamboo pipe which he fits together. Ah! He is cooking something over the lamp—little bits of chocolate-colored stuff. He holds one of the bits to a hole, and draws blue smoke into his lungs. By this solace, he seeks to banish his fear of me. But I see him, and he knows I see him. Now—— He listens. I bid him follow me! He rises! He is under my spell. He has dropped the pipe. He has opened the door. He is coming, coming, coming through the long deserted streets, following, following, all unknowing that he is walking to his doom. Ah, man of many crimes, you are near—very near—to that dread angel that garners us all. You hear him? He comes!"

The two policemen, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, clung each to each, in a frenzy of fear. The night city editor, knowing even as he did just what he was to expect, was touched by it; while the imaginative reporter had sunk to a chair and covered his face with his hands.

To all it seemed that from far away came light footfalls, increasing in number and in volume, until they sounded like a series of revolver shots.

"He comes! He comes! He is near! Very near! He cannot resist me! He walks into the trap! He is here!"

There came a burst of sound, a yel-

low flash of light, a stifling volume of smoke, and the shriek of one about to die. They heard something fall heavily to the floor.

The panel slid back. The lights went up. At their feet lay the body of a man with a heavy red beard and mustache, unkept, untrimmed.

The reporter fell on his knees beside it, and lifted the head.

"It's Healy!" he screamed. "It's Healy!"

And he fainted dead away.

The *Messenger,* which had the exclusive story the next day, said that Mr. Keels was too weak, from the strain of human materialization, to see any of his clients. And the other papers dared not gibe; for, no matter what his methods, Guy Keels had succeeded where every one else had failed.

The elevator boy got an extra hundred out of the five-thousand-dollar reward, and kept his mouth shut.

As for Guy Keels, it was hard enough to be imprisoned in the house for a day without having Corny ask him questions. In final exasperation, he pointed to the latest newspaper report which showed that an elaborate opium-smoking outfit, once in use by the royal family of China, and stolen during the sack of Pekin, had been among the treasures of Mr. Alvin Austin, and had been used by Desmond Healy during his confinement.

"It is easy enough for a man to stop in a grocery and buy enough tinned food to last him for several months," said Guy, "but it is far from easy to purchase enough olive oil to last for that length of time. An opium lamp cannot be used without either peanut oil or olive oil. Kerosene and coal oil make a disagreeable smell and spoil the flavor of the opium. When you mentioned that Miss Weeks had other things that were not stolen from her window sill, and that the theft of the olive oil occurred every night, I immediately surmised there was an opium smoker in the building.

"But it is no crime to purchase olive oil. Therefore, I judged that the person who smoked did not dare to go out of the house. I located Austin's room, and smelled around for the odor of the cooking poppy; but I did not find it. Then I surmised that the commonest trick of the smoker had been adopted, and that a wet towel hung over the keyhole. I thrust a pencil into the keyhole, and found I was correct. Investigation of the apartment shows that wet towels were also laid on the floor by the door, and hung over the lintel.

"Now, having found that Mr. Austin was in Albuquerque, where he has been located this morning by telegram" —he handed Corny a yellow slip as he spoke—"and finding also that he was usually absent for three months in the winter, and that most every one who knew him knew this to be so, I naturally concluded that some one who had every reason to fear the law must be the invader.

"But he must also be a friend or an acquaintance of Mr. Alvin Austin. I immediately began to call to mind those in New York interested in the kind of junk Austin dealt in; and, of course, old Donchian was one of those to come to my mind. Then, almost immediately, I recalled that this fellow Healy was supposed to be an opium smoker—that he had the pallid skin and the lifeless eyes of a continual and excessive user of the drug. That was enough. In fact, that was all."

He turned over on his couch, and picked up his book.

"By the bye, Corny," he said. "I wish you'd go down to Three Hundred Mulberry and find out what they want."

Which Corny did, to the exceeding discomfiture of that seat of awful power. He was not invited to return.

"A Touch of King Lear" is the title of the second story of this series, in September number.

Mr. Humphrey's Code

By Charles Neville

An unusual newspaper story, dealing with the last great "beat" scored by a star reporter whose failing was the means of his meeting with a man who held a peculiar code of honor

SINCE the amenities of polite relations with those in authority cost nothing and contain germs of simple diplomacy, Mr. Humphrey paused as he rolled his cigarette, to pass the time of day with Mr. Quinn. The time of day was evening, and Mr. Quinn bore his person with such dignity as he conceived to be suited to the policeman's uniform and star of office.

Mr. Humphrey found that he had a short time on his hands before the hour at which he should report for duty at the place of his employment. Mr. Quinn was detained at the corner by the necessity of awaiting there the coming of Lieutenant Hendricks, on his round of inspection. Also, there was room for discussion as to whether the defeat of "Kid" Hennesy by "Guinea" Repetto had been a genuine achievement, or merely the award of a deviously inclined referee.

These things being true, Officer Quinn felt some surprise when Mr. Humphrey was suddenly—even abruptly—impelled to take himself away. He was also disappointed, because in his heart there lurked the conviction that, with a few minutes longer to argue, he could have vindicated the mooted decision of the pugilistic judge. Consequently, he stood looking with a shade of regret at the swinging saloon door into which had disappeared the unlovely figure of Mr. Humphrey.

Mr. Humphrey was arrayed in an obviously new suit of clothes, the checkered pattern of which lacked repose, while the heavy sweater under his coat argued a fantastic taste. His hair was of a carroty red, his eyes of a mild blue; and when he talked one noted a gap whence two front teeth had in some manner been lost. The heavy gloves that gave the complete touch to the raiment of the young man prevented Mr. Quinn from noticing, had he indeed been so observant, that the tapered fingers were those denoting the artist—either such as ply brush and palette or deftly and unobtrusively find their way into the pockets of other people.

The cold fact of the matter was that Mr. Humphrey was more observant than Mr. Quinn. This being true, Mr. Humphrey had seen Lieutenant Hendricks approaching—not in itself an alarming incident. But also there walked with Lieutenant Hendricks another gentleman, who wore citizen's clothes.

Shortly the lieutenant arrived and deigned to introduce to Officer Quinn his companion who, he said, was Mr. Sullivan, the assistant chief of detectives of St. Louis.

Meantime, Mr. Humphrey had betaken himself through the saloon, and into the side street by another door. Fifteen minutes later, he entered the saloon of Tony Comoti, at Number Four-forty-one of a certain street, where, despite the fact that his name did not appear on the payroll, he had certain and regular duties to perform.

Fifteen minutes later still, Mr. Dellafield put his shoulder against the swinging door of Number Four-forty-one, and edged through the opening. He kept both hands in his pockets,

since pockets are a fairly acceptable substitute for gloves. Dellafield was as innocent of gloves as of the services of the manicure or the embellishments of the florist. Inside the saloon, he went eagerly to the circumscribed tropics about the red-hot stove, where he stood until comfort had conquered his shivering condition; his thin hands spread close to the heat until the fingers, which he worked experimentally, had become once more nimble.

Behind the bar, a white-aproned Italian looked covertly on; his white duck jacket, his full waxy face and elaborately curled mustache, stood out in prosperous relief against the prismatic background of bottles ranged evenly along the base of the mirror, with the fancy liqueur decanters and the polished cash register. The broad mirror behind was in part preëmpted by a bit of art in white stipple work, wherein a bird, of the ornithology peculiar to saloon mirrors and pavement card-writers, hung teetering on wings of many curves and flourishes. Over this decoration stretched the word "Welcome," evidently conceived and executed by the same master hand.

Dellafield sauntered to the counter, planted one leaky shoe on the bar rail, folded his arms on the polished woodwork, no glossier than his own frayed sleeves, and stood gazing into the mirror with an abstraction that took no note of either the host or his signboard. One corner of the glass threw back an insulting portrait, but Dellafield acknowledged the affront of the reflection with the impersonal smile of the cynic.

"He might perhaps have a shave, but that is merely incidental," suggested the newcomer, pointing at the mirrored man, as with the other hand he tentatively rubbed a thumb over a stubbly chin. "Merely incidental." He paused to study the image for a few minutes more.

"That guy is nuts," was the inward comment of the bartender. Outwardly he continued to wear an unresponsive expression of aloofness.

"The devil's advocate could scarcely ask a better exhibit." Dellafield nodded his head, as though satisfied with his own observations.

The man behind the bar stood with his arms folded, then asked, in an energetic play-or-pay tone: "Have something?"

Dellafield tossed a ten-dollar note negligently across the counter.

"Seltzer water," he ordered briefly.

The publican moved forward with alacrity and—such is the wizardry of unexpected money—produced from somewhere back of his retreating forehead a flickering expression of cordiality. Dellafield noted the altered physiognomy with a smile of quiet amusement. He raised the glass, and turned a whimsical face toward the other man.

"I am going to drink a toast to myself," he explained. "One that you can comprehened—in some future existence. 'To the legion of the lost ones—to the cohort of the damned.'" He rattled the ice in the glass, and sank into reflection.

"Say, that's all right!" announced the Italian, with ready favor. "There's two or three of them good toasts that end up with 'damned.' I wonder what guy dopes out them things?"

"That also is incidental," responded Dellafield, as he leisurely sipped his drink, with a cheerless countenance.

Under the surface of his nonchalance he was listening, and his ears gathered in certain clicks and rattles, together with the confusion of subdued voices in the rear.

"Have something else?"

"Nothing." The man shook some silver coins in his palm. "Your establishment may garner this in, but not across the bar. I hear inviting sounds from behind. 'The play's the thing.'" He turned his eyes toward the rear, and the bartender nodded, with a significant gesture, in acquiescence.

"The crap game is in this corner," he directed, in a cautious voice. "It's a nice, quiet little game. You've got to keep 'em quiet these days, with all this reform business going on. I don't know you, but you're a sport. It's all right."

"Thanks!" Dellafield passed through

the screen that gave entrance to the rear room. The proprietor wiped a beer mug and shook his head sagely at the portraits of bull terriers, pugilists and other fighting beasts that had been clipped from sporting sections for promotion to a Hall of Fame on his flamboyant wall paper. "That's a funny sort of skate," he commented, "but I reckon he's a sport, all right." To which opinion the portraits accorded a silent acquiescence.

From time to time the screen flapped to let out a depleted gamester; for the game, whether it be played with dice or cards, winnows out the waste material. In the parlance of a flaring placard, displayed above the table devoted to the crap game, "Dead Fish Can Float Out."

The "dead fish" were varied; but mostly they were Tenderloin types, of the species whose lips shape themselves into sullen lines, and in whose eyes cunning usurps the seat of reason. Yet, in order that men may not be discouraged until their pockets are emptied, it is essential that the alluring vision of success be held before their eyes. So, in the crowd about the tables were several players under whose excited hands the piles of money grew with a persistency that appeared to laugh at the vicissitudes of chance.

Disillusionment shocks the imagination; therefore one should not remain in such places until the last bona-fide players have gone. Then comes the time of reckoning, when these marvelously fortunate gentlemen "cough up their velvet"—which, being interpreted, means that they surrender back the winnings which were allowed them in order to tempt the outsiders.

Among the several conspicuous winners was the young gentleman of the carroty red hair, checkered clothes, and front teeth that failed to close ranks. He was occasionally addressed as Mr. Humphrey.

There was something in the face of this man which caused Dellafield to look at it furtively on such occasions as the necessary caution permitted. In amusements frowned upon by the law, suspicion is ever present, and any man's interest in any other man must remain casual. With equal guardedness, Mr. Humphrey looked at Mr. Dellafield.

At last Dellafield emerged from the game, with the air of a man who has attempted to be enlivened and has failed. The man behind the bar raised his eyes over the edge of the *Police Gazette*, to ask, with perfunctory courtesy: "Have any luck?"

Dellafield grunted. "The dice of the gods are always loaded," he grumbled. "More particularly the gods of chance."

He bent over to kindle a half-smoked cigar.

"Well, don't forget the number, and drop in when you are blowing by."

"The number is Four-forty-one, and you, I take it, are Signor Comoti?" Dellafield spoke indifferently, as though actuated by the demand of politeness.

"Sure, I own the dump." The Italian seemed to be enthusiastic. "I used to tend bar for other people, but there ain't nothin' in it. Be yer own boss, and you've got a good man to work for. Am I right?"

Dellafield nodded approval, and, casting his eyes about the shop, he added, as he took his departure: "You've got a nice place."

A few moments later Mr. Humphrey entered from the rear and, calling Signor Comoti forward, bent over the bar to engage him in confidential talk. "Who was dat guy?" he demanded.

The proprietor looked up vaguely, and shook his head. "Search me," he said. "I never seen him before." Then, with the manner of one wishing to be reassured, he added hopefully, "Looks like a sport, all right, don't he?"

"Yes, he's a sport, all right—if you don't care what you say," commented Mr. Humphrey, with much scorn. "You ain't got no license to run a dump without a bunch of guardeens! I reckon if the mayor came in here and drank a common beer, you'd steer him back there, and then send for the chief of police to cut in. You give me a pain!"

The waxy face of the Italian became suddenly freighted with apprehension.

"You don't mean——" he began; then he broke off in alarm.

Humphrey signified that he could make use of a glass of beer, and resumed, with greater composure: "I don't know the guy. He may be all right, at that; only the minute I piped him he looked to me like a snitch. I wouldn't put it past him to pipe the thing off at the chief's office, unless" —he raised his eyes inquiringly—"you have got things fixed with the chief."

Meanwhile, in a café where representatives of the press were wont to foregather and waste their brief intervals of recess, sat a group of men occupied with steins of beer and bowls of chili. Their conversation had to do with the achievements of those who make the daily papers, and they spoke with the intimacy of men discussing their own craft.

One of them, a young man, Browles by name, was a cub, in all the glamour that surrounds a novitiate of the reportorial order. Into his receptive ears his older companions poured recitals of celebrated beats and accomplishments calculated to spur his efforts and interest.

"The greatest reporter this town ever turned out," ruled Hargrave, of the *Clarion,* "was old George Dellafield. In his day he has put to his credit more performances that have gone down in the history of Newspaper Row than any other three men of his time."

"Remember his 'Take a Tip' column in the *Standard* about ten years ago—and how it sent a few exalted crooks to Europe and other sanitariums?"

Sterdecker, news editor of the *Commercial Courier,* nodded. "And the stuff he sent in to the McCreedy syndicate on the Græco-Turkish war—I guess none of you fellows have forgotten that."

"Time was," resumed Hargrave, "when he had all the managing editors bidding for him; conducted a sort of journalistic auction, until his salary ran up to a point where all the desk men got excited and jealous. He had all the other fellows sent to Cuba for the war looking like untutored camp followers."

"I was trying to be city editor of the *Traveler* when we had the cyclone here," said Benton, hitherto a listener. "You fellows remember the night—wires down, chaos everywhere, everybody up in the air. We had out all the men we could muster. It struck several city eds. who were working that night, that the proper stunt was to get special leads of the cyclone story. I dragged Fitzgreen out of his bed, at the risk of bankrupting the business office. His novel, 'The Vineyards of Spain,' had just run through the s'teenth edition; and it struck me as a sweet inspiration to have him string us a bunch of fussy adjectives for our first-page narrative." Benton laughed reminiscently. "We made his autograph in zinc etching across two columns; then I sat steady and waited to hear from our friend the enemy. The first paper I got was yours, Sterdecker, the *Commercial Courier.* Dellafield was on the city desk over there then; and when I saw his first page I wanted to cry like a whipped kid."

"Did he write the lead himself?" ventured the cub.

"Write a lead!" snorted Benton. "Not by a whole heap. He had simply put a black border around the entire page, and filled it up with a list of the authenticated dead in leaded caps. No tawdry description there. Do you suppose a man in town wanted to be told how those men, women and children died?"

"Since he has been down and out, I have scrapped with him a dozen times, trying to persuade him that I hated to dine alone and wanted him to come along. He is a hard sort to help," mused Sterdecker irrelevently.

"That is his notion of pride and class; his innumerable forefathers," suggested Hargrave. "You see, he comes out of Virginia, where they still hold to the Chinese dogma of ancestor worship."

"I guess Dellafield is the most knightly gentleman and the most un-

regenerate drunkard that ever lived." The comment came from Benton; and, as he studied his stein, his words had the unconscious softness of affection, verging on tenderness.

"What became of him?" inquired the new recruit, with something of eagerness.

"The usual thing in this game," replied Hargrave shortly, "when a man loses his grip. It's a fast procession, and it doesn't pay to drop out. It took Newspaper Row some time to realize that Del would not do. It seemed a sort of sacrilege to relegate him to the has-beens."

Sterdecker took up the explanation. "There was a year of idleness—half-starved drunkenness, months in the hospital, all that sort of thing. Then the efforts to reinstate himself, always met by the same answer from the city editors: 'Sorry, old man, but my staff is full up.' And, of course, Del was broke."

"He has a job now," said Benton, "with the *Star*. George Brownlow was either wiser or easier than the other city editors. He talked out with the brutality of genuine kindness. He said: 'Dellafield, you know your reputation—unreliable, and a drunkard. The first time you slip up here, it is all off with you! I will give you one more chance at fifteen dollars a week—those are my terms.'"

"And Del—accepted them?" asked Hargrave.

"Sure, he accepted them; he was not in a position to decline them."

The door opened, and Dellafield himself came into the place. The party arose to greet him with enthusiasm, and introduced to him young Browles, with many protestations of greatness.

The shabby reporter shook hands around, his cheeks flushing, and, painfully conscious of his unshaven face and black-ringed eyes, protested against their compliments.

"No, really, I must go!" he declared, after a bowl of chili and a half hour of anecdote. "I am on the wagon, and I've got a story to write." He smiled around the group, as he added: "I don't mind telling you fellows what it is. I am going to scoop you all on a story that none of you would print."

"A political exposé?" queried Hargrave. "It's a safe bet that it is. Your sheet is the only anti-administration paper represented here."

"You win," replied Dellafield. "I am uncovering to the world the gambling dens which the police conceal, and probably protect. You behold in me the personification of civic righteousness."

"So long," suggested Hargrave, "as you don't attack our private vices——"

"In that," retorted Dellafield, a self-conscious note sounding through his laugh, "I should hardly be a proper instrument."

The story of the gambling houses running under the eyes of the police was duly heralded by aggressive headlines.

The grand jury, stung into a perfunctory diligence, heard the testimony of Dellafield, and indicted numerous offenders. In his interview the district attorney declared that he would prosecute the gamblers to the extent of the law, and "allow no guilty man to go unwhipped of justice." The first trial came on for hearing, after many continuances, and Dellafield swore to the facts. Comoti swore it was a lie, and produced a dozen habitués of his place who attested on oath that the saloon was orderly and law-abiding—a place dedicated to innocent enjoyment and wholesome and moderate entertainment.

Foremost of the witnesses for the defense, most effective of all in his straightforward narration and in his unshaken consistency under cross-examination, was a youth of carroty red hair, who responded to the name of Humphrey, and who met the gaze of lawyers, jurors and judge with an expression of childlike honesty enthroned in pale blue eyes.

The jury—it is difficult to forecast what a jury will do—failed to reach a verdict, and because of this circumstance Comoti became alarmed. It

struck him as a revelation that, if his dozen perjured disciples could not outswear one shabby reporter, whose words bore a ring of truth, he was in danger; and his apprehensions communicated themselves to the others likewise indicted. The statute provided that all convictions for this offense should carry a fine of five hundred dollars—which was an inconsiderable matter—and a forfeit of liquor licenses for all time—which was vitally important.

Sundry gentlemen whose business was the selling of beer, knowing that where men roll dice they must moisten their parched throats, and that every forfeited license has an equivalent in unsold kegs, came unostentatiously forward.

"Get this matter quieted up," said the sundry gentlemen. "In the matter of expense, go as far as you like. We are behind you."

So it happened one day that, as Dellafield entered the Criminal Courts Building to report a murder case, he was stopped at the door by a deputy sheriff.

"I want to talk to you, Del," said the functionary; and the two repaired to a vacant witness room in the rear.

There, after sundry circumlocutions, the deputy sheriff looked at the whitewashed walls and inquired vaguely what the reporter would take to leave the city and travel for his health. Nothing was said as to why the deputy sheriff had suddenly become solicitous. On the contrary, he explained that he had no idea why "sundry gentlemen" would be willing to defray the expenses provided the scribe would remain away for one year.

Dellafield listened and smiled. Finally he said: "Bob, you may go back to Comoti and that crowd, who got you your job, and to whom you belong. Tell them that I shall be here when these cases are called on the docket. Tell them that I understand their game. Tell them that I am not for sale at any price they are able to pay."

The deputy sheriff, calmly rubbing his shaven chin, made answer. "I don't know nothing about that, Del. Anyhow, there ain't no harm done we won't have no falling out about it."

"Heaven forbid!" agreed Dellafield, with an amused smile.

Later on, the deputy sheriff announced to an elaborately dressed person in the courtroom that it was "all off, and nothing doing."

Whereupon the person addressed nodded and, after the deputy sheriff had helped him into his silk-lined overcoat, departed, murmuring that "he would have to see the man higher up."

Outside, on the street, Dellafield chanced to meet a young man, floridly dressed, red-haired and innocent-eyed, who called himself Mr. Humphrey.

Taking him gently by the arm, Dellafield led him to one side and spoke to him in a quiet voice.

"I dare say it has been some time since you have heard yourself addressed as 'Red Ryan'?" began Dellafield.

The young man started violently. For a time the innocent expression was frightened out of his eyes, and in its place came one of sudden terror. But those who engage in the more perilous professions must learn to guard their faces, and almost at once Mr. Humphrey was again smiling, without apparent concern.

"I guess you got yer dates mixed," he drawled. "My name is Humphrey. Who is this party you took me for?"

The two men strolled side by side, and Dellafield explained.

"But for the fact that the chief of detectives has a poorly equipped office in this town, and the additional fact that you have not heretofore operated here, I could take you to the city hall and show you several pictures of the party I took you for. You would find them labeled 'expert dip,' 'porch climber,' 'safe blower,' 'stick-up man,' 'yegg,' 'burglar,' 'hold-up man,' and various other descriptives which now escape me. What is a more singular coincidence, if you were to step into the Bertillon office you would find that the measurements fitted you with exactness—and experts claim that no two men in the world have the same Bertillon

measurements." Dellafield paused to look at the other, and under the smile which had become a grin he noted that his companion had turned almost ashen.

"The party I took you for," continued Dellafield, "is so distinguished in his various professions that the police in almost all the cities of the South and West are anxious to find him. So many indictments are pending against him that, if once captured, his combined terms of imprisonment would sum up to something like fifty years. Perhaps it would amuse you to drop over to the chief's office and see how nearly the description fits you?"

The other man drew back, then laughed. "I guess not," he said.

Suddenly he began to discourse with great enthusiasm upon the unusual quality of the weather.

Dellafield listened with courtesy, and, after the rush of words had subsided, answered:

"Unless you wish to pay the call I suggest, and providing, of course, you wish to remain in this town, you will not add to the list of crimes I have enumerated that of perjuring yourself again in these cases."

Dropping the hypothetical form of expression, the newspaper man spoke directly.

"Ryan, the 'bulls' in this town are not on to you yet; but I have lived in other towns, and I know you. I know that, besides being the most accomplished criminal of your age, you have another side to your nature. I know of certain things you have done that compel my admiration, and I don't care to turn you over to the courts. If you will give me your word that you will not appear again for Comoti, I shall hold my tongue." He paused. "Are you on?"

The men had halted in their walk, and the criminal searched the face of the other for half a minute with deliberate inquiry. At the end of that time he had sized up his man.

"I have got you doped out as a square guy," he said. "You have got to trust some people, and I will play on the level with you. You keep your face shut about me, and I will stay out of court." For a moment his voice took on the ring of genuine feeling. "Why, hell!" he exclaimed, with a note of appeal. "I am makin' good here, and am bein' on the level. That crap game is still runnin', and I gets ten dollars a day for bein' a 'booster.' If you squeal on me, I am gone."

Dellafield smiled. "All things are comparative," he said, "and I like to encourage the infant industries of honesty."

He held out his hand, and the other took it. Both men knew that, while one was a "snitch" and the other a thief, this contract would be kept.

The months flitted by. August spent itself in torrid sultriness, breaking records for drought and heat. The tenements sweltered, and the pavements sent up steam in the wake of the sprinkling carts. September arrived, with the heat hang-over worse than August's original offense.

Dellafield, wasted by the daily wrestling with the craving that had become second nature, shoved his feet laboriously as he walked.

He slept heavily through the hot nights, by the aid of certain powders constantly increased. The pinched-chested drug clerk who pounded a little pestle in a little mortar in a little prescription room, eyed his powder purchaser knowingly and shook his head as he folded the little papers.

"If he ever hits the booze again, 'all the king's horses and all the king's men——'"

Then, his words opening up a new line of thought, he glanced at the form sheet which he had shoved aside. "Speaking of horses," he mused, "that filly Flying Heels looks to be dropped into a soft spot this afternoon. Guess I'll go to her for five or ten."

Each morning Dellafield issued forth more sluggishly from his alcove in the boarding house where he foregathered with other wage earners of the lesser variety. Each day the ambulance call sounded more frequently, and the natty

hospital internes dashed out behind their galloping horses, in aid of the heat prostrations.

Dellafield held on because he could not afford to let go. "Perhaps," he reasoned, "the reputation of a year's sobriety may serve to lift the embargo of the derelict." Six months of the probationary period had passed.

During these days the reporters of the *Star* took their vacations. Dellafield had not ventured to ask a leave of absence. His status was too nearly that of an office charity to permit the claiming of prerogatives; and now, the court vacation being ended, he had been assigned to the criminal division.

He sat, late one sweltering afternoon, hunched listlessly over a typewriter, collarless, with sleeves rolled above his elbows. The last reporter, serge-clothed and soft-shirted, was taking his departure for his two weeks in the country.

Dellafield's mind struck back to that era when he, too, wore correctly cut flannels, and drove with women of his own sort over smooth roads, coolly splotched with grateful shadows, between green, upstanding hedges—in short, the time when he was yet a gentleman. He knew a place where the pines sighed all night in the breezes that brought the tempered booming of the surf on the coastwise rocks—a place where a man might sleep without chloral.

He slapped viciously at a droning fly, and bent laboriously to the "rehash." In the court dockets clipped from the afternoon paper he read:

> Tony Comoti suffering gaming on premises licensed as a saloon.

The case in which he was sole commonwealth's witness was set for a day one week hence.

"Dellafield!" The city editor's voice came from the desk, where the only fan in the office swirled a hot current of air around him.

The reporter arose and went heavily over, mopping his face.

"Del, you haven't taken a vacation yet, have you?" began the desk man.

The reporter flushed with pleasure; he said nothing.

"You can leave—let's see, this is Monday—say the day after to-morrow. And say," continued the chief, "the old man has noticed you look a little down and out. You can stay for a month. You aren't getting much in the way of salary; so we will just let your pay go on while you take a breathing spell."

Dellafield's feeling was deeper than he cared to show. As he rolled a cigarette, his fingers trembled. "Thank you, sir," he answered briefly; then, starting away, he turned back, with a sudden recollection.

"Mr. Brownlow," he suggested, "I had better put it off a week. That Comoti case comes up next Tuesday, and I am the only witness."

The chief nonchalantly addressed himself to the "copy" on his desk.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered briefly. "Pass that up."

For a moment Dellafield stood regarding the other with a speculative gaze. "You don't understand it," he said. "They tried to buy me off."

"We will explain all that. You go ahead; it doesn't matter." The city editor spoke with a note of finality.

Dellafield only reiterated: "They tried to buy me off; it's a point of honor."

Brownlow's indifference dropped suddenly away, his face turned red, and he whirled about in his swivel chair.

"See here, Dellafield"—there was a raw note in his voice—"we have been playing the reform game for these loafers long enough. We have dug up evidence; we have testified; we have convicted. Let these damned officials do their own work. We are not bound to run the courts."

Dellafield eyed the red spots on the other's cheekbones for a time in silence; then, looking into the chief's drooping eyes with a steadfast gaze, he replied: "I shall not be away when that case is called." His inflection rose to a defiant note.

"You need not bawl out, Mr. Dellafield," warned the other, in a low voice. Then he continued, in steadier tones:

"Mr. Dellafield, you will take your vacation now—and take it out of the State—and take it for a month. Do you understand? You are hardly in a position to dictate to the management of this office. We took you in when others would——"

There was a dangerous flash from Dellafield's sunken eyes, and from the gaunt cheekbones down the color went from his face, leaving it pallid.

"Stop!" he cried, as he took a threatening step forward. "So they bought you, did they? When they failed to get me, they came to 'the man higher up.' I dare say they got you cheap."

Half a dozen men were on their feet. One of them laid a hand on Dellafield's shoulder, and spoke with soothing remonstrance.

"Dellafield, you are excited; you do yourself an injustice."

Dellafield went on, without excitement, but with quiet contempt and deliberate insult in voice and words. "So this is the *Star's* brand of reform! What is the price for sicking your dogs on the quarry, and then calling them off when you have had your hush money?"

The city editor's face became livid; his lips trembled. Deliberately he sat down and wrote his signature on a printed blank; then, arising, he handed the slip to Dellafield.

"The cashier will pay you what is coming to you," he said. "We won't need you any longer. No man can insult me in my own office."

Dellafield turned and walked out. As his eyes wandered here and there with a vague, unrealizing expression, the swinging screen of the saloon across the street struck in upon the blank of his numbed thoughts.

"Ah!" he breathed slowly, with an exclamation of discovery. Cutting across the street, he pushed open the screen, and disappeared into the saloon.

Late that night Tony Comoti stood, placid as usual, behind the bar. Shirt-sleeved laborers and flashily dressed loafers lounged about the place, with cooling glasses of beer, listening to the pleasing drone of the large electric fans. At one end of the counter, surrounded by half-tanked admirers, stood a prize fighter, rehearsing the saga of his glories in the ring. Among those who listened was Mr. Humphrey, whose duties in the rear had languished with the intense heat and the competition of the fishing camps along the river.

The swinging door on the street flew open with violence, and the man who had fallen against it lurched unsteadily into the interior. For a time he stood looking about him, half stupefied, his hands shaking, his eyes drunkenly burning.

Then, as the waxy face of Signor Comoti came into his confused view, he steadied himself and called out loudly, shaking an unsteady fist as he spoke.

"I am fired! You bought them, but I'll be there—I'll be there till hell freezes!"

The men about the place glanced up with languid interest, and some of them laughed. One even inquired: "Who's your friend, Tony?"

But Mr. Comoti smiled benignly as he replied: "A gent by the name of Dellafield."

"That's all right, pal," purred the host to the newcomer, who had made his way to the bar. He pushed out a whisky bottle and glasses. "That's all right," he repeated. "Have a drink with me."

Dellafield unsteadily poured a whisky and reiterated stupidly: "I'll be there, damn you—I'll be there!"

"Then I side-stepped and feinted wid m' left, and puts over a right hook to his jaw—like dis." The talkative pugilist was proceeding to illustrate his achievement, with quick, jerky steps and swift jabs that punctured the atmosphere suddenly, in spots. The saloonkeeper, reaching over the bar, touched his arm softly; and, as the fistic hero bent his ear to listen, whispered a few choice phrases behind his raised hand.

What they were is not recorded; they were heard only by the speaker, the man addressed, and one other—Mr. Humphrey. Even Mr. Humphrey caught only one sentence; but he dis-

tinctly heard the word "snitch," which is slum Latin for informer.

Dellafield was very drunk. He staggered over to a man who stood apart, somewhat more respectable in bearing than the others.

"They sicked me on," he complained, with the thickness of drink in his utterance. "Then, b' gum, they called me off when they got theirs!"

The man smiled. He had no idea what the other was talking about; so he made a non-committal and sympathetic reply: "That was a damned shame."

"Down there in Virginia, sir," continued Dellafield, who must be extraordinarily drunk to talk of these matters in a saloon, and to strangers, "the Dellafields have been living, from Shir George, who came across to Jamestown —you know Jamestown?—down to my fatzher. They'z all buried there—t'zat is to shay, all but me, and none of 'em —none of 'em at all, shir—ever sold out! No one's ever such a damned fool before'z to try to buy a Dellafield."

Dellafield raised one finger, and wrinkled his brow in the laborious effort to explain clearly the extent of such utter folly.

"George Brownlow," he declared, "is a damned fool!"

A burly figure jostled the speaker, who wheeled, tottering unsteadily. At the same instant, young Mr. Humphrey, of the carroty hair, made a misstep and, catching his toe on one of the heavy iron cuspidors, fell forward, with a startled exclamation. In falling, he lurched against the pugilist, throwing him a bit to the side, and arose with many profuse apologies for the clumsiness of his accident.

Mr. Humphrey had timed his fall badly. He had intended it to save Dellafield; but the prize fighter had been swifter than he had calculated.

Turning when he had felt himself jostled, Dellafield caught a sledgehammer right swing on the point of the jaw, and dropped heavily to the floor.

"When you see me comin', get outten my way, you——" A string of vile expletives hung behind the outgoing thug, like a wake of bubbles.

They picked Dellafield up and, carrying him outside, laid him in the mouth of the nearby alley. There he was discovered by a passing patrolman, and in due time a duck-clad ambulance surgeon, after vainly feeling for a pulse, had lifted him into the wagon.

At the hospital the young doctor made a brief and impersonal report. "Evidently fell and fractured his skull, while drunk," he said. Then he added: "Queer, a man can't leave alcohol out of his diet in such weather!"

Before the patrolman or the hospital interne had discovered the body, Mr. Humphrey had been back at the alley, diagnosing its condition. To be exact, Mr. Humphrey had been one of those who had removed the fallen man from the saloon; and, when the others had returned to the more cheerful light, he had remained for a time where the odors from the hot asphalt and the heat of baked walls made a place unsuitable for a gentleman to die out of his bed.

As "Red Ryan," alias Mr. Humphrey, knelt by the figure of the reporter, a sudden fury swept into his being—a fury born to his elemental code. "They've croaked him!" he said, in a fierce whisper. "They've croaked him—the damned crooks!"

Throughout the extended career of crime to which Red Ryan was constantly adding new achievements, he had always felt violent repulsion against the idea of taking human life. With homicide he had never been charged; and the idea of this totally unnecessary crime filled him with a sense of outrage beyond expression.

To his simple and uncomplicated way of thinking, a man who had played fair with him and spared him the greatest inconvenience had been villainously "croaked." The call upon him became more imperative than if it had been written in the Decalogue, to avenge the offense and punish the offender. As one outside the law, inimical to the law, he must be his own agent.

To this end, Red Ryan began his search for the prize fighter, who had

left Comoti's place after striking the blow. Knowing his haunts, Mr. Humphrey had small difficulty in locating him in another saloon not far distant, where, with a new throng of auditors, he was reciting the tale of his achievements and basking in the flattery of his greatness.

Mr. Humphrey remained unostentatiously on the outskirts of the listening crowd, and, so often as it seemed expedient, yielded his applause to the narrative.

From place to place the pugilist wandered, killing the hours until that time, shortly before dawn, when, in his nefarious habit of life, came the time for sleep. Always near by, though never too near, lounged Mr. Humphrey, laughing, conversing, biding his time.

At last, when the murk that precedes dawn settled on the squalid Tenderloin —when its night-long orgies had worn themselves out—Mr. Repetto, the middle-weight champion, said farewell to the last and most adhesive of his companions, two squares from the door of his own domicile.

Mr. Humphrey, lurking innocently in the shadow of a doorway, noted, with a grim smile of pleasure, this last of many partings.

Suddenly Mr. Humphrey felt a cold chill trembling down his spine, and the hand that he thrust into his pocket trembled with violence.

Mr. Repetto must be struck down, and struck down so that, when he rose again, he would long remember the episode. That elemental conclusion was clear, yet it was the profession of Mr. Repetto to strike down others. All evening he had explained how easy was the task, and so, in acting as the instrument of the higher law, Mr. Humphrey felt keenly the physical inferiority of his five feet seven inches of height and his one hundred and thirty pounds of weight. He drew from his pocket a small leather instrument that hefted weightily in the hand. Bulky at one end, it fell away to the slenderness of a walking stick at the other. Being hollow, this small device, which must make up the difference in physique between Mr. Humphrey and Mr. Repetto, was stuffed with small shot.

Such an implement must be used with caution. Since its purpose is that of an anæsthetic, its unguarded use may result in death.

Meanwhile, Mr. Repetto, strolling along with a stride somewhat unsteady, paused to "search through his clothes" for the key of his lodgings. Mr. Repetto was whistling.

At the same moment, Mr. Humphrey nerved himself; and his voice, trembling with fear, hissed into the ear of the other man: "You croaked him!"

Mr. Repetto, indicted by an uneasy conscience, wheeled; but before he had turned he dropped to the pavement, and lay still.

The agent of vengeance looked furtively up and down the street. Dropping to his knees, he laid his ear in wild alarm to the thick chest of his prostrate victim. Next he felt the pulse; then, rising to his feet, he felt his knees give way under him like paper. Staggering over to a picket fence, he held desperately on, as he slowly repeated to himself:

"I've croaked him!"

Physical fear had put behind the blow of Mr. Humphrey a greater force than was necessary, and Repetto had turned his face so auspiciously as to catch on the temple a blow aimed at the chin.

Somewhere in the distance, Red Ryan heard the rap of a policeman's nightstick on the curbing. "The bulls!" he exclaimed. "The bulls!"

Regretfully he thought of the business soon to be reopened at the place of Tony Comoti, with his incidental wage of ten dollars a day, and realized his exile. Several squares away, he caught the whistles of switching freight engines, and ten minutes later he was snooping cautiously about the railroad yards.

Just as dawn broke grayly over the factory chimneys to the east, a freight train pulled out beyond the city limits. Red Ryan was a passenger on the bumpers.

The Land of the Lost

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Vanishing Fleets," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Captain James Tipton, of the United States cruiser *Seattle*, ends his leave of absence and bids good-by to his lifelong friend, Bill Pape, ex-miner and cowboy, at Cheyenne. The *Seattle* puts out of San Francisco bay in haste, because Jim Tipton believes implicitly in the prognostications of Doctor Pablo Martinez, a noted scientist who has predicted a series of earthquakes and tidal waves which will devastate half the world. An immense tidal wave wipes out San Francisco for the second time, and many South American coast towns as well. Jim has fears for the safety of his friend, who is prospecting for gold in South America. Doctor Martinez disappears, but mysterious warnings by cable and wireless telegraph are received from him by the various governments. These messages are sent at short intervals from places widely apart; therefore it is believed that they are hoaxes. A last message from Martinez seems to tell of his approaching death. The second wave comes while the *Seattle* is at sea, looking for disabled vessels. A year later, Jim, who believes Bill Pape dead, is dining with the American consul at Callao, Peru. The consul tells him that a man named José Vasquez, an assistant to Doctor Martinez, believes that the scientist, to whom the world has reared a monument, is still alive. Vague stories are abroad to the effect that, shortly before the great cataclysm, the scientist was seen in several places widely apart, at practically the same times, and always in the company of a gigantic Indian. Pape and Vasquez turn up together, and go aboard the cruiser. Sealed orders for Jim arrive, and the *Seattle* heads southward in search of the pirates who, it is believed, are responsible for the disappearance of the *Lord Wellington* and the cruiser *Berkeley*, and for the derelict condition of the freighter *Dawson*. A wireless message is received—"Come farther at your peril!" This is followed by a similar message signed "*Berkeley*." Not heeding the warnings, the *Seattle* arrives at a bay in what is apparently a new continent. The cruiser suddenly comes to a dead stop, and the men are riveted to the deck by some strange power; then, after being carried swiftly along by some inexplicable means, the *Seattle* comes to rest opposite a great white city, in a lagoon where other lost ships are stationed. A visitor dressed in strange fashion, who introduces himself as Manco, a councilor, takes Jim, Pape, and Vasquez ashore with him, and quarters them at his home, after introducing them to his daughter, Ayara. Manco receives a visit from Choto-Aucco, a councilor who loves war. Vasquez recognizes the man as the abductor of his master, and tries to throttle him. Doctor Martinez appears suddenly, and explains the mysterious circumstances of his disappearance. Manco tells the story of the new land, and of the Quichua, as the ancient race inhabiting it is called. Choto-Aucco is impeached by Manco in the council. That night Jim awakes to find himself in the clutch of unseen assailants.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOT ENCOUNTER.

THE officer writhed and twisted, but was held as securely as though he were an infant. At last, when he was almost smothered by the clutch of the fingers on his throat, he desisted from his efforts. Instantly the hands relaxed, and his senses began to resume action. The noise of a terrific fight, but with no outcry, came from the adjoining room, where with greater difficulty the adventurer was being overcome. Jim made another desperate attempt to release himself, but at his first convulsive movement his throat was again compressed, this time with more violence; and, recognizing the futility of struggling, he again yielded, and listened.

He could hear no noise from the other room now, save that of stentorian pantings; and he surmised that Bill, too, had been compelled to surrender. He was furiously indignant, boiling with rage and helplessness. Suddenly he was

This serial began in the March issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, fifteen cents each.

lifted to a sitting posture; a scarf was wrapped fold on fold around his mouth, effectually gagging him; his hands were caught together behind, and bound with another scarf; and he was lifted to his feet and moved forward.

Similar sounds in the rear led him to believe that Pape, also, was being conducted from the palace. For a flitting instant he feared treachery on the part of some one in the household; but he concluded that it was impossible that any other than Choto-Aucco would have been sufficiently daring to commit such an outrage.

To his surprise, he was led directly to the bathroom. He wondered if drowning were planned, by those who held him, as a means of silent death. Discarding this idea, he waited, immobile and unresisting, straining his hearing for indications of the fate of his friend, alarmed lest Bill had gone so far in his fight that he had received injury.

The sound of stealthy approach continued, and the footsteps were in the room; he heard the other party halt, and then the cautious closing of the panel door.

A hand storage light of great power was abruptly turned on, and, to his amazement, he saw almost at his feet a yawning hole, beneath which a traplike section of the floor swung where it had been opened from below. He saw steps leading downward into blackness. The shadowy forms of at least ten men were around, and, as he anxiously stretched his neck and peered among them, he could see the upright figure of the miner, also bound and muffled. As an evidence that he had given a good account of himself before being overcome, beside him stood a man, holding to his own face a scarf whose whiteness was redly sullied.

As the friends met each other's glance, Bill's face relaxed from a fierce frown, and one eye slowly winked, while the visible portion of his visage distorted itself into wrinkles, indicating that the muffling folds over his mouth concealed a cheerful grin. It was evident that, although the adventurer had been no easy victim, he was unharmed; and Jim felt relieved.

He was dragged forward and down steps which ended in a subterranean passage, whose smell of newly excavated earth indicated that it was of recent workmanship. When Pape had been brought down beside him, there was another wait while a man slipped back above. He returned within a few minutes, carrying a bundle; the men carefully closed the trap, holding the light against its bottom to direct their efforts; and Jim observed that even the hinges were new. It was evident that Choto-Aucco had been preparing for emergencies, had tunneled underneath the palace of the councilor Manco, had cut away the tiling of the bathroom floor, had fortified it with timbers, and thereby had the household above at his mercy.

They started away, and he saw another passage, from the unfinished state of which it appeared to the officer that a mistake in direction had been made, or that for some unknown reason the work had been stopped.

They were led forward, a light being carried in advance, while in the rear another was blazing. It was like traversing the long drift of a mine; the beams above being roughly hewn, the damp ground beneath their feet giving out hollow echoes as they stepped, and the two lights throwing confused shadows of moving legs and feet. They went for some distance before any of the party spoke; then the men around them began to mutter softly.

They seemed to be arguing among themselves, and the officer gathered that they had suffered some disappointment. Once they halted and held a long discussion, some of them gesticulating and pointing backward; another, as though to convince his fellows of something, stooped over, picked up a tiny piece of rock, and industriously scratched on the floor. From where Jim was held he could not see the tracings; but he caught the glitter of Bill's eyes which peered over the man's shoulders, and wondered what the strange performance could mean.

Abruptly, as though a decision had been reached, their captors arose from their haunches and again hurried them forward, but this time at a more determined pace. Their positions had been reversed, and ahead of him Jim could see the broad, bare back of the adventurer, with its rippling muscles moving beneath the white skin as he swung his shoulders in walking, the fitful light behind accentuating every shadow. As he hurried onward in the damp, cold air of the tunnel, clad only in his pajamas, the officer felt his teeth chattering; but Bill, although stark, appeared to be comfortable and undistressed by his nudity.

The light in the lead stopped and was shifted up and down, and the captives could see that they were in front of a heavily barred door of metal let into a wall of masonry. One of the men threw back a big catch, and pulled the door open; they were thrust forward into a dimly lighted vault completely surrounded by walls, save on the opposite side, where a closed door faced them. They were halted, and their enemies grouped around them.

Jim could see them plainly now—all of the swarthier Inca type; two of them wearing the uniform of common soldiers, with the sun emblem on their sleeves. They were all of big stature, one or two being even taller than the miner, whose six feet two made him conspicuous among his own people. Jim discovered that several bore the marks of bruises on their faces, and that one man's tunic was nearly torn from his back, where at some stage of the conflict the miner had clutched him by the collar.

The man carrying the bundle came forward and said something to the prisoners, motioning with his hand and indicating that, if they would be peaceable, they would be unbound and allowed to don their clothing. Both Pape and the officer nodded acquiescence, and all the Incas—save one who quickly untied them and removed the gagging folds from around their heads—grouped themselves about the outer door.

Bill was no sooner liberated than he gave his arms a great stretch which caused a convulsive start among those at the door, who apparently stood in awe of his physical prowess. He opened his mouth, grinned broadly, and contemplated the crestfallen officer.

"Well, what do you think of this, Jimmy?" he remarked pleasantly. "Ain't we in one hellufa fix?"

Jim glanced at the group behind, said nothing, and started toward the bundle of clothing; but his friend reached it first. He saw Pape give an almost imperceptible start as he unrolled it, and then carelessly kick something aside. He could scarcely forbear giving an exclamation. The object which the miner had so nonchalantly pushed away with his foot, as though it were of the very least importance, was the heavy, worn revolver.

While he was staring at it, he heard Bill, in a voice of the utmost calmness, as though making a casual remark, say:

"Move, you chump! Get your duds. Don't stand there gawpin'. You'll give it away. They think it's a hat or somethin' like that—part of my regular outfit—because they've always seen me wearin' it."

Assuming unconcern, the officer gathered his clothing together and, suppressing his excitement, dressed himself, while across from him Bill donned his garb, without paying any attention to the gun that lay on the floor between them—their only hope in a fight, and their only chance for escape. The Incas had broken into conversation again, and were being directed by the man who had scratched the characters on the floor. Jim saw that Bill was watching them from the corner of his eye, and that he appeared elated and even amused.

He frowned a warning to preserve silence, put his hat on his head, and, last of all, as though it were of small consequence, picked up the gun and thrust it into his waistband, where it could be reached for quick action.

Jim wondered what campaign he had worked out, and waited.

Again there was a discussion which

the aliens construed to be regarding the advisability of rebinding their hands, but the miner smiled at their captors so amicably that they hesitated. He turned his back on them, walked deliberately over to the farther edge of the wall, and stretched himself out, as though courting rest; and the officer, conceiving it as his best part to join in any demonstration that his friend might make, sat down unconcernedly, with his back against the closed door.

The Incas appeared satisfied that they were harmless, closed the outer door, and barred it from the outside. The prisoners heard their soft voices and padding feet returning along the passage through which they had been brought.

"Good!" said Bill, becoming suddenly rapid and alert. "I reckoned that was what they would do."

They stood together in the centre of the room; the adventurer pulled his gun loose, ejected the cartridges into his hand, and rapidly worked the trigger, to convince himself that it was in perfect order; after which he reloaded it. In the meantime, he made a hurried explanation.

"That time we stopped back there was because there'd been a slip-up. That feller scratched a plan of Manco's house on the floor, to show the other fellers how the land lays, and pointed to three different rooms, but was doubtful which one. Savvy?"

Jim looked at him questioningly.

"Why, they want José as well as us, and probably the doctor. They can't get the old man, because he's campin' with a friend overnight; but they can get José, and pretty soon they'll come trundlin' him in just as they did us. See?"

Jim nodded his head.

"Well," the adventurer went on, with unaccustomed rapidity, "it wasn't any use for us to jump 'em before they started—ten against the two of us. They'll get José, and they'll have to bring him back through this room, because there's no drift on either side of the door, nor any place out of the tunnel except a short one which ends under Manco's house. They've got to pass through here and lock us in before they can get out. When they bring the boy here, that'll make three against ten—and he's a right good performer, too."

"For Heaven's sake, don't talk so loud! Some one may be listening."

Bill's voice dropped to a rapid mutter, and he gave a glance around.

"When they open the door we must be on either side; but we want 'em all to get inside before we open the game, so we can run back up the passageway after shuttin' 'em in—if we can. What do you think?"

"Good! But José—we must, of course, take him with us, and——"

"Sure! Don't you see they'll most likely bring him in here and unbind him, too, the way they did us? But we don't want to wait for that. The minute he gets in, you don't wait. Just take your knife and rip him loose, while I get busy on the fellers between us and the door, if there are any."

The officer felt in his pockets and found that his knife was missing. Pape, reading the blank expression on his face, hastily made a search for his own, and gave vent to a muttered exclamation of disappointment.

"Might have known it!" he said. "They don't know what guns are, but they're on to knives. Humph! They thought they'd disarmed us."

"That is too bad," said the officer. "Because, if you have to hold them off until I can unbind José, they will beat us, or——"

He stopped and looked at the miner, whose jaws had gone shut.

"Or the gun will have to help," the latter asserted significantly.

They took their places, dreading to find themselves in a position where they might have to take life, but determined to do so if no other way were open. They perfected their plans, talking in low whispers. The minutes slipped by for a period that convinced them that their captors were having difficulty; and they began to fear there had been some slip, that they might be left in their prison, forgotten, or their positions unknown. They began to regret

that they had not forced the issue in the first instance, even though the odds were against them, with their enemies between them and the passageway which they must traverse to find safety.

Just as they were becoming alarmed in reality, they heard voices outside, and gathered themselves together for the final combat, leaning against the walls at the side of the door in careless attitudes; but really tense and ready to spring at the first opportunity. They heard the bar withdrawn, saw the door swing open; and then two men entered, carrying something. They dropped their burden to the floor as the others came in.

Bill, leaning forward from the wall, gave a snarl of rage as he saw that it was José, who had evidently been rendered unconscious by a heavy blow on the temple.

"Pick him up and carry him, Jim!" he yelled. "Now!"

His long arm flashed out, his fist struck the nearest man full in the face, and the Inca went down in a heap. Instantly there was wild, whirling fury let loose. Jim sprang to the Chilian, threw him over his shoulder, and broke through to the open door, conscious that everywhere were striking arms, and that several times he received blows, one of which almost felled him. He had but one dominant thought—that he must get José out into the passageway, where he could leave him, and return to his friend's assistance. He won through, found himself alone, laid José on the floor some twenty paces ahead, and ran back to where the adventurer was grimly fighting, with but one or two men between him and the door.

"Coming, Billy—coming!" the officer cried at the top of his voice, and caught a giant whose back was turned a terrific blow behind the exposed ear.

The diversion favored the adventurer, who suddenly pulled his pistol, caught it by the muzzle, and brought the butt crashing into the face of the only man left between him and his friend. He leaped to the entrance beside the officer, and they made one frantic, futile effort to close and bar the door; but the man whom Jim had struck had fallen across the threshold, and kept it from shutting.

They had no time to make a second attempt. The miner was now yelling instructions.

"Get the boy and run, Jimmy! Run while I hold 'em off. If they crowd, I'll shoot!"

The door on the opposite side of the room was unlocked and swung open as he spoke, and he saw the inrush of other men who, attracted by the uproar of the conflict, had come to reinforce their companions. The officer rushed into the darkness, caught up his inert burden, and began plunging through the tunnel toward Manco's house. He heard Pape's footsteps following after him for a way, the screams of rage behind, the shouts of some one urging them forward, the clamor of pursuit.

Then, as the sound gained, the tunnel reverberated with a shot.

He never stopped. The booted feet were again running in his direction. Behind was an instant's pause of consternation, and then their enemies came on. Again the shot, and this time the voice of the adventurer, madly shouting a defiant warning and swearing that he would kill the first man who came.

Another shot—another halt. Jim counted three and said to himself that there were but two more cartridges with which to hold off their pursuers. Pape was up to his heels, now.

"Faster, if you can, Jimmy! For God's sake, faster. We can't hold 'em!"

Jim stumbled ahead harder, and fell to his knees, but regained his feet without ever releasing his hold on José. Bill had halted, and as Jim ran he listened expectantly for the two final shots that would end their strongest defense. He knew that in blind shooting by direction only there was little chance of making each cartridge count, and he wondered whether any man had received a fatal wound. He bumped into a shovel leaning against a wall, and fell against steps leading upward, just as he heard behind him two sharp reports quite close together. He wondered if he had taken the wrong passage, for he had no recol-

lection of seeing a shovel on the way to the vault; but desperately he climbed the steps and thrust against the door with his head.

To his joy, he found that, instead of opening downward as the door from the bathroom had done, it gave, lifted upward, and dropped back with a crash. Even as he fell outward into the room, he heard the ringing steps of the miner plunging after him, and together they threw the door downward, stood upon it, and tried to discover where they were.

"You took the wrong turn, Jimmy," the miner panted, his sense of underground direction being more acute than that of his untrained companion.

They heard a stifled scream of relief, a pattering of bare feet, and the room was suddenly thrown into a blaze of light, while beside the buttons on the wall stood Ayara in a loose robe, her long hair flowing back, and the coverlet of her couch dropped in a twisted heap beside her feet.

"We've been attacked," the officer said hastily, in Spanish. "Quick—help drag something heavy over this, so that we can run to the bathroom."

The girl sprang to Bill's assistance, and they dragged the ponderous metal couch over the trap, which was being surged against from beneath. Then together the officer and the adventurer leaped toward the door leading into the hallway. They leaped only to draw back with exclamations of disappointment; for the delay in blocking the entrance through which they had emerged into Ayara's sleeping apartment had given their assailants time to come through the other passage into the bathroom, and out into the hallway.

On the opposite side of the wall hung a shield, above which was an ancient sword. As the miner, striking with his clubbed pistol, jumped outward to meet the enemy, Jim wrenched the blade from its fastening and, with the familiar weapon in his hand, sprang forward.

There were no shouts; but the grim silence of deadly conflict, the labored pantings of strenuous muscular exertion, the sobbing sighs of the wounded, and the ring of metal when the officer's sword clashed against the blade of a spear. Jim, parrying and thrusting automatically, springing rapidly backward and forward, and noting the terrific onslaught of the adventurer who was now striking with both hands, heard the crash of glass behind him, but dared not turn his head from the front to discover the cause. The vantage ground must be held, at all hazards, until some one came to the relief. Bill, however, gave an exultant exclamation from between his clenched teeth, as he wrenched a shaft from a man's hand and again plunged into the front.

"Courage, boy! The girl's busted through a window!" Smash—spat! "Gone for help!"

No punishment they could inflict appeared to check the charge. Now they would gain ground and press forward until their feet slipped on the ensanguined tiles; now they gave ground, obstinately, but outnumbered, wearied and losing, fighting all the more desperately, fighting interminably, and praying between clenched teeth for help which seemed never to come. A voice from down the line rallied the men when they wavered, and Choto-Aucco pushed to the fore, adding his force to that of his fellow rebels.

The officer felt his influence in a more determined attack, and knew that the fight was going against himself and the adventurer. They struck harder, but as fast as an adversary went down another filled his place. Before this they had made no attempt to kill, but now they strove to inflict nothing but death wounds. The perspiration was streaming down Jim's face; but Bill's was set, hard, and grim, and he was as cool as though playing a boy's game, exulting in his strength and determined to win or go down, fighting to the last.

A door behind them opened, and Manco, his eyes ablaze, rushed into the room, crying in the Quichua language some command which was unheeded. Almost at the same moment a blare of trumpets resounded through the halls, and the followers of Choto hesitated, wavered and turned for flight.

The king's bodyguard, steady, pitiless and invincible, shoulder to shoulder and shield to shield, with drawn swords and solid steps, charged down upon them, the light gleaming from their shining helmets and mailed fronts. On they came in formidable array, stern and inexorable, driving the rebels before them and cutting down those who resisted, as relentlessly as though they were inanimate obstacles barring their progress. They drove them back into Ayara's room where, defeated and hopeless, the last of them dropped their arms and submitted in shamefaced silence.

Following the guard which she had summoned came the white-robed figure of Ayara, her hands clasped in distress, her eyes wide with horror. She bent forward to look through the portals into the disordered room. Bill, panting and relaxed, had lifted José's head. She rushed in and knelt beside the Chilian; and he, returning to consciousness and stupefied by the strange scene, smiled up into her eyes.

Jim, with the point of his sword wedged into a crevice of the tiled floor, and leaning wearily on the hilt, stared at the insurgents, who were now ringed in by the golden mail of the king's guard. The captain was pointing scornfully at one of the men in uniform. Manco, erect, dignified and indignant, was facing the defeated men, with fury smouldering in his eyes. Jim heard him say something, and caught the name of Choto-Aucco. Several of the guardsmen detached themselves and began hurrying through the palace; and Bill, after lifting José to the couch and leaving him to the ministrations of the girl, came forward.

"He was here a minute ago, Manco," he said. "Just a minute ago. He was in the lead of the crowd when help came."

One of the searchers came running into the room and said something to his captain and Manco. The latter threw his hand before his eyes.

"What is it?" asked Jim, noting his distress, while the adventurer leaned forward to catch his reply.

"Choto—Choto has escaped!" answered Manco, with such rapidity that his words lost their customary precision. "Knocked down a man at my gate, and ran away over the road which leads to the power house."

He stopped, and shook his clenched hands in front of him.

"He has gone to sink the ships in the harbor, and thus make outside war certain—to get control of the violet rays and kill all who oppose him—to conquer, or end his life in the endeavor!"

The words were scarcely uttered before the adventurer, with one quick, springing movement, was at the ledge of the window through which Ayara had gone for assistance. He dropped out into the night, and ran with all the speed he possessed along the road which but the morning before he had traversed and learned. With desperate energy he was running the most desperate race of his life.

Even as he disappeared, the councilor hurried to a wireless telephone, to warn the engineers of the plant that danger was approaching. Jim hastily picked up the empty revolver from the floor, and rushed to Pape's room to secure cartridges with which to reload it. The captain of the guard began giving quick orders.

One squad of his men led the prisoners away; another squad carried the wounded; yet others ran through the night after the adventurer.

The waning moon, white and pale, lighted up the golden shields which they dropped by the wayside to disencumber themselves, and picked stray glints from the points of their spears.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIGHT IN THE POWER HOUSE.

The adventurer felt that he would need all his strength for the long run, and, after the first few hundred yards' sprint, he began to check himself and to husband his reserve. He slowed down, tightened his belt, ran rapidly along a level stretch, jogged doggedly up a hill, and at its top stopped long enough to

remove his boots, which he left lying in the middle of the road.

His hat blew off, but he did not turn to recover it, counting each pause as that much distance lost.

After the great exertions of the night and the brief sleep he had had since last he traveled the road to the power house, he felt worn out; his only consoling thought was that the warrior ahead must have undergone even greater strain, and probably had not rested for at least twenty-four hours. In time his second wind came as a relief, and he ran more freely, feeling as though his sinewy legs, as they sprinted onward with machine-like regularity, were no longer his own, but a conveyance carrying his arms and body forward for the final contest.

The pace began to tell upon him at last, and he reduced his speed to regain breath, consoling himself in the meantime by the thought that his enemy must be just as much distressed. He believed that Choto-Aucco, not realizing that pursuit had followed so closely on the heels of flight, would not crowd and spur himself forward as fast as William Pape.

"If he can go four miles any quicker'n I can, he's a sure-enough race horse!" he muttered between his panting lips, as he climbed a steeper grade.

Each time he came to a turn of the road he peered ahead, straining his keen eyes for a sight of a figure on the pallid trail; and each time, when he failed to descry a black spot telling him that Choto was being overtaken, he set his teeth, clenched his hands more closely to his sides, quickened his pace, and ran a little more steadily.

"Got to overhaul him," he whispered to himself. "Got to do it. He'll sink every ship in the harbor while all the boys is asleep, unless I head him off. It ain't a case of can I—but a showdown! I must—I must!"

The moon, setting out across the far hills of the bay, gave a greenish, unreal light—just enough to show the pathway along the shouldering edges of the mountain, to throw thin shades at the feet of the roadside shrubbery, and to paint the naked rocks above a cold, repellent hue. Bill's shadow ran beside him like a tireless companion, and he fell to watching the stride of the ghost-like thing that was the other part of himself, laughing to it, consoling it, encouraging it, and advising it to move up a little faster, as the game was one of the biggest it—the shadow—had ever played in. He wondered what "the boys" in Wyoming would say if they could see him there, running through the night in the newest and strangest country under the stars, running to fight with a man who would be contented with nothing save the death of his pursuer or of himself.

Once, failing to see anything, he stopped to listen, hoping that his sense of hearing was better than his eyesight, and that he could catch some sound of the running feet ahead, where the warrior chief of a lost tribe was sprinting forward to the power plant whose possession would decide all things. With extreme difficulty he suppressed his own hurried breathing for an instant, but everything was calm and still. Nothing could be heard! Yes—something!

From the direction in which he had come he distinguished the faint shouts of men, and surmised that the king's guard, led by Jim, was following him as fast as they could.

It cheered him to know that, at the end of this race, could he but get there in time to check the madman from pressing the murderous keys of the power station, his struggle would not be prolonged, but would be terminated by the arrival of those others and Jim

"Good old Jimmy! Always game and true—comin' back there as fast as he can—Lord bless him!"

He thought of the precise little Austin, whose rigidity of discipline concealed a heart that was as kindly as any he had ever known; of the old boatswain, Jenkins; of the gunner, Welkins; of Swain, the first lieutenant. They should not be slaughtered in their sleep, if he could help it. Not quite yet!

His stride lengthened involuntarily,

and he ran so swiftly for a time that he felt his lungs aflame, his heart leaden, and hammer-like throbs striking his temples. He stumbled, and fell to his hands and knees, sliding forward with the impetus of his own motion; but he never stopped when he gathered himself together and brushed the sleeve of his shirt across his eyes. He limped for a few steps, but kept springing ahead. The fall made his thoughts revert to his footing; and he was glad that he had visited the plant, and that his habit of observing everything with which he came in contact had led him to a more than casual inspection of the trail.

That rocky place ahead, he thought, would halt him for a few paces; but he needed the rest. He surmounted it, and found the running easier. He wondered, now, what would happen if Choto were first at the goal. Perhaps he would find but one man there, as there were but two employed at the station, a day and a night engineer; but surely Manco would have telephoned ahead, and those two would put up a fight. It was a pity these people didn't know the use of real doors! If there was a good strong one up there, the men in the plant could bar it; but that flimsy screen could be kicked aside in an instant. Suppose the men had not been warned!

With this possibility, he pictured to himself the entrance of the warrior while the night engineer slept, slipping stealthily past the drowsing form to the huge bank of keys, buttons and levers on the opposite wall—the one which the day man who talked such funny English had shown him only yesterday morning. Choto would throw a lever which would turn the great pent-up power into those submerged chunks of metal out yonder, press a button which would still further excite the currents of the magnets to their highest capacity, and—down there on the bay the lights would go out, as the dynamos stuck tight; and, before the watchmen could give warning, the vessels would settle down, down, until the open portholes flooded—until the water rushed up level with the decks, came swashing over them; and in the hulls below men would awaken from sleep to gasp in the torrents, to struggle madly to find a way out, to writhe less strongly, to feel their ears bursting with pressure, their senses departing!

And Choto-Aucco, the greatest executioner of all time, venomous and victorious, would be standing beside the keys, up there on the hill!

Billy cursed between gasps, and tried to go faster. Not yet had he sighted his quarry, although but a short distance above—and yet so far—stood the brown, squatty building which held within its walls the last decrees of this rebellion into which he and Jimmy and José had been unwittingly plunged.

He looked over his shoulder at the bay. The lights still shone, tiny sparks telling him that not yet had the magnets been turned on.

A few yards more—only a few yards more!

Why hadn't he seen Choto ahead? Was it possible that any one in the world could beat the wearisome race he had made up that long, rugged stretch of yellow road lighted by the dying moon? He did not pause to question whether he could have passed the warrior chief. He did not stop to husband his strength for the final charge. He only endeavored with his final strength to get there before the other could act.

A snarling scream came from the power house ahead, and a man reeled out of the doorway, staggered drunkenly backward on his heels, with both hands clasped to his side, and then, as Pape came up the last slope, threw his arms aimlessly above his head and plunged forward on his face.

Bill forgot his own distress, jumped over the body which lay prone in the path, and gained the door.

Inside the room where the humming motors drove round and round, feeding the weird night lights of the luxuriant gardens and forests, he saw two men struggling. One of them had been crowded to the wall. As the adventurer, with outstretched hands and heaving

breast, passed the threshold, he knew that it was Choto overpowering the engineer. A knife was in the councilor's uplifted hand; it flashed in its descent as it was thrust into the throat of the man, who had resisted to the last. The figure against the wall collapsed suddenly, and as Bill leaped forward and Choto released his hold it slumped to the floor in a sitting posture, inert.

Bill seized Choto's right wrist and forced aloft the hand holding the knife. With his knowledge of wrestling tricks, he twisted his free hand and arm around the warrior's left, rendering it powerless. For a moment he rested, and discovered that his enemy was laboring for breath as heavily as himself. For a long time they stood there, both too spent for immediate exertion, fiercely meeting each other's eyes. Their faces were close together; that of the war chief was fixed, defiant and full of hate, but bore no sign of fear. He muttered to the face opposite something which was like an exclamation of gratification, as though he were glad to have this last battle with the only enemy who had ever bested him—this alien descendant of a detested race, who had balked him when he would have throttled the Chilian in Manco's palace, and again when he had seized and carried him away a prisoner, hoping to bring the nation to terms.

The adventurer, on his part, exultant in the knowledge that he had arrived in time, was confident and deadly in earnest. He admitted a grim hatred for the man before him, and a willingness, if necessity arose, to slay. The bloodlust that lies in all strong and primitive men was surging in him, was bidding him use no halfway measures when he got his breath, was urging him to wipe this man out of the way because he had murdered and would do so again.

Choto broke the suspense by giving a sudden wrench, and the struggle began. They strove to and fro across the floor, the Inca endeavoring to release his hand from that inflexible clutch on the wrist which held no matter which way he turned. His face hardened until it depicted neither confidence nor fear, but rather desperate intent to finish quickly one way or the other. Now he crowded Pape by mere physical weight back against the wall, and his eyes gleamed with momentary hope of triumph. Yet, when he had the adventurer's shoulders almost pinioned, the sinewy form twisted loose with serpentine ease and quickness, and he found their positions almost reversed.

Now they nearly fell over the legs of the dead man, who sat like a placid, contemplative spectator of the awful struggle, appearing but half interested. Bill seized the opportunity to try to trip his adversary, and threw a knee upward, hoping to double the councilor forward and make him lose his grip on the knife, without which they would be fairly matched. The Inca slipped back in time to avoid the blow, and threw his own heavy leg forward for a hip-lock; but the miner evaded. Disappointed in this, Choto tried to liberate his left arm; but Bill stiffened his so sharply that the Inca groaned with pain, and it seemed that his elbow might be broken backward like a weakened hinge.

Bill's foot slipped on a spot of oil, and he almost went down, his enemy taking instant advantage and hurling his weight forward. The adventurer was bent over until he thought he must let go the wrist or have his back broken. Then by chance he slid sideways and almost threw his adversary; but in the onrush Choto gained and forced him back until, weaving and writhing, he was for the first time held against the wall. But both were too exhausted to move, and merely held their positions, panting, determined, unquenched, grim, staring into each other's eyes, and still locked in an embrace of desperation.

Choto recovered sooner than Pape had believed possible, gave a quick wrench, freed himself, and with catlike quickness leaped back to the very centre of the room, where he stood beside a huge table with the knife in his hand. They took several long inhalations, and the adventurer advanced from the wall, his body crouched, his head thrust forward, his short hair bristling, his jaws

set, his lips parted, his hands open, with fingers that looked like talons ready to seize. Choto, amazed at this determined attack, receded step by step around the room while striving to recover his strength. The alien was plainly possessed of greater endurance and quicker powers of recuperation.

Their feet slid across the floor in time; their shadows, thrown by the lights in the ceiling, appeared to be synchronized, stealthy, violent and untiring. They worked past a corner, along one wall, around the table twice, over again to the side of the room, and in front of the keyboard, whose possession meant life or death to all those out on the waters.

They paused, each trying to plan an advantage, each meditating attack. Choto assumed the offensive, and the adventurer was driven to retreat, all the while keeping his clear, penetrating eyes on those of his adversary. The time seemed interminable. It had stretched to ages, in which they two had lived in a world of enmity, each striving to kill the other and knowing that it was an issue wherein death alone could give the decision.

As he again backed around the circle, Bill saw from the corner of his eye something that promised support—something that could be used as a weapon to offset the knife, of which he had failed to disarm his opponent. It was a wrench, dropped from the lifeless hands of the engineer. If he could but get that, he thought—and then began to work his way to that side!

Another leap behind the table, whose top was too broad to permit of thrusting across, a half revolution, and a spring! He believed that he could win out.

His assurance was rendered stronger by a sound of far cries. Ah—they were coming at last, after all these years—Jimmy, good old Jimmy, and those fellows with the burnished shields and golden spears! He was not alone in hearing the sound. Choto-Aucco gave a start and moved with desperate agility. The adventurer sprang for the wrench, caught it, and jumped sidewise just in time to miss the flash of the descending blade. He struck madly with his weapon from his half-crouching position, and landed on Choto's left arm a blow which caused the latter to groan with pain. It sounded like the rending of bone, and the Inca's hand hung limply.

Before the miner could recover, the knife had risen again and had been driven downward. Bill gasped, closed in, and strove desperately to prevent another blow; but the knife reached him with sickening deadliness. He caught the lifted hand with both his own, held it, and slid his fingers upward until they grasped the blade and hilt guards together. Heedless of his injuries, Bill, with this hold, twisted with despairing energy.

Choto, overconfident, had been forced to the wall. His eyes were changing now, and in them for the first time was a great fear, as though he foresaw that this persistent, furious, inexorable alien would prove invincible and victorious—would defeat him in the last stand which he believed he was making for his dying race.

Slowly—quite slowly—he felt the fingers taking a new clutch, while the white face—so close to his own that their breathing was intermingled—never relaxed; the ridged muscles of the cheeks never softened; the pressure of the lithe body against his own increased. He tried a hold with his injured hand. He saw the end; his grasp of the knife was lost; and Bill, with a last effort, maddened, weaving, swimming in a world high above the floor and close to the switchboard for whose control he had struggled, struck blindly, automatically, half-consciously, and felt the lights go reeling out in dizzy, flickering circles of flame.

He could fight no more, he thought. If that one blow had not sufficed, "the boys out there" must die! He had done his best.

Choto-Aucco seemed to slip away from him and follow down the wall. Weary of life, and spent, he felt his own body, still clasped in that last frantic hold, being dragged downward

through long descents. Even as the king's guardsmen with their golden mail burst into the room, led by a wild-eyed man, bareheaded, ensanguined, raggedly clad in the blue uniform of the sea, who shrieked between cracked lips "All right, Billy—all right—we're here!" he fell across the body of his enemy, with a sense of going to sleep.

The lights went guttering out, and all was very black, while the half-interested spectator with the relaxed hands and glazed eyes still sat beside them in deathly quietness, as though the end of the tragedy were not yet rung.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE END OF THE RAINBOW.

One by one they came panting into the room—the guardsmen, the stern Manco, the anxious José, and the white-faced girl, with terrified eyes and wealth of waving hair which swept down over the dressing gown, on which were dull red spots caught from the night of red.

They gathered round the grieving man in blue who, unaided, had lifted the adventurer to the table, ripped the faded shirt from above the wounds, and was stanching them as best he might, while over and over again he called: "Billy! Billy! For God's sake, Billy, answer me! Can't you hear, old man—can't you hear? It is I—Jim—I'm here!"

For once, the generous lips did not smile back.

Manco leaned over, felt the heart beat, and looked up with a nod of reassurance. He assumed command. He gave low, curt orders. He was grave and self-possessed, and barely noted that unchecked tears were streaming down the youthful face of the Chilian, who stood by the head of the still, pallid man on the table.

Guardsmen ran from the room, to reappear with boards thrown across the spears which had arrived too late.

Carefully, tenderly they lifted the great supine body upon the litter, while Manco stooped above the crumpled figure of the war chief, who, having fought to the end, had been vanquished and had gone out, as he would have wished, in the midst of fiercest strife. Choto-Aucco was beyond the reach of impeachment; his dreams of empire were over.

They straightened him out, as befitted the form of a councilor of the nation, and improvised another litter. Then in procession they undulated with regular stride out to the roadway, where the gray dawn had replaced the light of the moon, and all nature seemed at peace. They marched in silence profound and wide-spread; for even the dynamos which drove the weird lights over distant gardens and forests had been stilled, until other hands might take the place of those which would never control them again.

Everything was tranquil, calm and unchanged, although the fate of Azonia had been cast on the wheel and saved. The haze-bound peaks still loomed above the distant ships where watchmen struck mellow bells that for hours had been threatened with a silence which their iron tongues might never break. The sad, yet hopeful cortège that plunged down the incline and away toward the unawakened city behind the ridges of the hills, seemed incongruous and out of setting, in the brooding calm of the hour. No word was spoken save now and then when the bearers were urged forward by the officer from the alien world—that vast thing outside, beyond wide seas, which for so long had been the terror of the ancient nation.

Sometimes Jim walked for many paces beside the litter in the fore, and called softly. Once he flamed and muttered curses against the hand which had stricken his friend; then, at last, when the road narrowed again, he walked beside Manco who, old, worn, sorrowing and gray, stalked forward, at the adventurer's feet, like a general unhelmeted by defeat.

"Patience, friend, patience!" he said, when he caught sight of the officer's dejected face. "I have sent a runner ahead who goes to your cruiser for your surgeon, and who will summon the wisest man of our land. Let us not despair!"

Yet, as he talked, his own hope burned faint as a candle in a desert wind; and fears oppressed him in behalf of the great, candid, fearless, buoyant man who was being carried before him, asleep in the soft unconsciousness of desperate wounds.

As they hurried onward in grim order—the litter with its burden, the officer and the councilor, the grief-numbed Chilian and the girl with unbound hair—there came behind them at greater distance others who carried the more gruesome relic of tragedy, and closely marching soldiers whose helmets caught the light of the morning. They were like the rear guard of beaten legions returning from a hard-fought field.

Thus defeated and yet conquering, they gained the city, passed between the lines of homes and public buildings whose gardens and pergolas, terraces and porticos seemed observing them with the soft eyes of the dawn; they trod wearily along the white, unsullied streets where echoes came back thin and unmeaning, entered the little park with its gay flowers peeping up through veils of dew, and turned in between the chill white pillars leading to the palace of the king.

Jim had been walking like a man in sleep, with his eyes staring unwinkingly ahead, listless of his destination; but the sound of his heels on the tiles seemed to arouse him, and for the first time he noticed where they were going. He stopped and protested to Manco that it was better to remove the adventurer to his room in Manco's home; but the latter, with the same gentle gesture he had used once before, when they together for the first time had invaded those very halls and tragedy seemed unimpending, told him that it would be impossible.

"For the reasons," he said, "that when rebellion is alive the place of the king's guard is in the throne room; and, again, because none but the king may order the disposal of one who has slain a councilor in any cause, and legend says that the man must be brought before him. It is custom; it will cause but little more than a halt, and no harm to our friend. Everything is doubtless arranged. Be patient!"

Again they passed, between the lofty doors with the insensate figures of copper glowering down upon them, into the stately audience chamber. With measured stride they came to the very foot of the steps leading up to the throne, where advance guards had hastily drawn aside the councilors' bench and the table which supported the sceptre and crown, and had thrown a heavy rug on the floor, to protect the wounded man from chill. With exquisite care the bearers lowered their melancholy burden from the litter, and stepped back in motionless parade, with spears at rest; only their stern faces betraying anything unusual.

Jim looked anxiously around the chamber, but could see no one who had not been of their party, save another row of guardsmen behind the throne.

For an instant he was impatient, then resigned. He felt an awful reluctance toward satisfying himself that the inert man was still alive, and his fingers trembled when slowly he put them forth, touched the damp forehead, and then stretched them farther to feel the fluttering pulse. He arose from his knees, and again became impatient. The seconds seemed to be years.

His head dropped forward as he stood above his friend, looking down at the still face, with its wearily closed eyes and matted hair. Manco turned expectantly toward the curtained entrance, and José, with hands clutched together before him, stood at the adventurer's feet, while Ayara at his side stared like one in a trance of horror.

In the outer hall a portion of the cortège had halted; custom again decreeing that a rebel, though dead, might not enter a state presence which he had violated. Through the great doors there sounded in the deep stillness the sentry's tread, unchangeable as fate, walking to and fro as his predecessors had walked for all the thousands of years, keeping ward over the Quichua throne.

The curtains suddenly parted with a swift, flowing sound; a white-bearded

man came hurriedly into the room and, without so much as a glance at those around, went straight to the supine figure and dropped to his knees beside it. He thrust one hand with deft quickness into the folds of the torn blue shirt, felt the heart, and gave an encouraging nod. He stripped loose the temporary bandages, paused, looked very grave, and then slowly replaced them.

The officer, who had been studying his expression, as though reading the most momentous answer of all time from what it might disclose, felt a chill at his heart. His face turned almost as gray and still as that of his friend.

The surgeon looked in pitying helplessness at those around him. They were all leaning forward now, some with hands held out, as though begging compassion; even the line of the guard had lost its rigidity, as they stood with eyes resting on the surgeon or turned downward to the one who had fought a valiant fight for his friends, for them, and for their country. So intent were they all on the decision that they did not hear the entrance of the king, who strode quickly in and stood above them. His face looked haggard, anxious, old. He scarcely returned their salutes, and in a voice but little above a whisper he asked the surgeon a question.

If the officer had wanted more information, he could have received no more explicit reply; for the surgeon arose and, by every look, gesture and tone, gave a verdict of hopelessness. The king folded his arms and stood with a look of mournful resignation. The surgeon knelt again, and beckoned for some one to lift the adventurer's head. Jim dropped down and pillowed it on one arm and knee, while the white-bearded man applied a restorative which, after a few moments, bore effect.

Pape opened his eyes as though with reluctance, gave a convulsive move, and threw out his arms; one hand resting on the steps, the other falling languidly over the edge of the rug. He had the bewildered air of one drawn back from another world. At last he recognized Jim above him, and gave a feeble smile. He was given more of the stimulant; he made an effort to sit up, but fell back. The gray eyes searched the faces of those around, and became a little more serious.

"Got it, have I, Jimmy?" he asked.

His friend, dry-lipped and unable to speak a word, nodded his head.

"Choto?"

"Dead!"

"Ah—what else happened?"

"Nothing."

Again the weak smile; the eyes half closed, then reopened. He made another attempt to raise himself, but could not.

"If that's all," he said, in a somewhat stronger voice, "what are you all lookin' so solemn about? Ain't there an end to every trail? Is the world goin' to stop because—because Bill Pape's goin' out? Hell, boy! Don't mind me! I'm all right!"

His eyes rested on José, down whose face the unheeded tears were again streaming, and then on the girl by his side. His face became earnest and paternal.

"José," he said softly. "José."

The Chilian knelt beside him.

"I'm too tired to say much, and you're the only feller around here that needs any advice; so I'm handin' it to you. You're only a boy. Don't look for the end of the rainbow. I've got my hand on it now, on the linin' of it that I've looked for, and——"

He stopped, and they saw that his fingers were gently feeling the steps of gold leading up to the throne—the gold that had lured him all his reckless, venturesome, careless life, without hardening the big heart within him. His voice had been falling lower and lower.

"And it ain't worth while, José. There ain't nothin' worth while in all life and all time but love and truth. You've got 'em both, if you want 'em. Ayara—well—take love and hold it while you can—and truth comes natural to you, anyhow. You and——"

Jim lifted his head higher, but he could say no more. He rested his fingers on the "end of the rainbow"—the broad, gleaming steps.

Manco had dropped beside the sur-

geon, anxious to render some assistance. Even the king was bending far over. The sun, coming up, dropped a spot of white on Pape's breast. He looked kindly into Manco's face, with a half-whimsical expression; then fixed his gaze with unutterable affection on Jim.

He seemed to be trying to say something more; but the light in his eyes was fading slowly out, and the officer, stooping close to the pale lips, thought he heard, faint as a sigh, the words:

"Jimmy—Jimmy—so - long—good—good-by!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BETTER WAY.

They laid the adventurer away on the crest of the rugged cliff which bordered on the harbor they had first entered; above the spot where the impotent shell from the *Seattle* had left its scar; high up on the point where the free winds might caress his resting place and whisper to him of all the wild untrammeled things he had known, been a part of, and loved.

His friends of the cruiser were brought ashore—the grieving Austin, the men of the wardroom who had loved him well, the grizzled old boatswain, and the gunner. A solid spot of blue, they marched ahead of the cohorts of the guard, appearing sombre in contrast with the gleaming shields and spears of gold, the shining helmets and purple-emblazoned breasts. The muted trumpets sounded no dirge, but gave one mournfully triumphant peal of farewell, as though in honor to a fallen king; and men and women of the ancient race, who had heard the story and honored one who could fare so bravely forth, shed soft tears.

When it was all over, Jim sat alone in his room, in inconsolable grief. He had but one more part to play; and it—everything—was of small importance. He answered a summons, and walked beside Manco down the hill to the palace, where once more he was to appear in the national crisis, to fortify his translated account of the insurrection by his presence while sentence was passed. Neither he nor Manco spoke, for each suffered—the man who had lost the brother of his heart, and the councilor who had understood, admired and felt affection for the dead adventurer.

In speechless progress they walked over the inlaid floors of the entrance, and up to the copper doors, which were draped in purple now—an honor ordered by the king, given hitherto in mourning for a dead king only. Jim took no note of the high tribute, but passed into the vaulted chamber, like one in a dream. He was saluted as he came between the lines of the guard, from habit and training alone he recognized the salute. He was conducted forward into the stately audience chamber, without observing that it was filled with the most distinguished of the nation, that all looked at him in sympathy, and that he was accorded unbounded respect. That the nation's ruler beckoned him to a seat close at hand was of little moment. It was all hollow—this empty show of honor. No king of earth, no council of patriarchs and wise men, could bring back the warm handgrasp, the careless song, the hearty laugh, the buoyant life that had come to a close there at the foot of the dully resplendent steps.

He sat benumbed while the defeated followers of Choto-Aucco were brought into the room, along its shadowy length, and halted before the rigid, impassive man who sat on the throne to deliver judgment upon them for their treason. They came far to the fore, and dropped submissively to one knee, while the men of the outer guard who had them in charge dropped the shanks of their spears to the tiles with a single resounding clash which sounded like a pitiless forerunner of what was to come. Manco from his seat read the formal charge against them, in terse periods.

Jim was to know after many months what was said; for, even if the tongue had been his own, he could not on that day have comprehended. His thoughts were too far away, wandering listlessly over the hills of Wyoming, across the

Alaskan tundras, through the sunny plains of Mexico, and over the precipitous Andes, as they retraced the wandering steps of Billy Pape.

The chief councilor did not speak for a long time, but looked with condemnation on the vanquished insurgents. When he addressed them, he thrust his chin forward; his voice was cold, trenchant and judicial. His speech was short.

"You have been guilty," he said, "of taking arms against the nation. You have disturbed its peace—you have assailed its existence. You have been foolish, perhaps led astray by the evil council of one who is no longer among you—who must answer before a higher tribunal for all his acts, whether good or ill. You have been the first men to use violence in the combined Quichua and Inca nation for more than three hundred years; the first to make war against authority in more than a thousand. You have been instrumental in taking human life, have robbed Azonia of its honor as a host, and have been frustrated from taking other lives and destroying other honorable records only through the bravery of an alien, who sacrificed himself, who went unflinchingly to his death and was more worthy than any of you."

He paused, to give his words full effect; and in the very simplicity of his arraignment there was such a world of rebuke that the prisoners appeared to cower before the impending sentence. He glanced at the officer, whose eyes were fixed on the floor; and in the brief inspection his face softened in momentary sympathy, although it became more stern, and his attitude more inexorable, when he again looked at the twoscore before him.

"You are condemned," he resumed, in tones of incisive severity, "to perpetual banishment. You are to be thrown out as unworthy to live among your own people, unworthy to communicate with them, to wander in alien lands under alien conditions; unfitted for the task, unable to advance, hopeless of pardon from now until the end. Exiles without a country, your very names are not to be mentioned by the lips of those who dwell here in harmony, who shall forget you as being unworthy the honor of memory. You are sent forth as outcasts, to work for the foreigner, to be his servants—pitiable, incompetent things beneath his heel!"

His voice had arisen as he progressed, until it scourged them with its contemptuous intonation; and the picture he had so truthfully portrayed of their future was one in comparison with which death would have seemed a boon. He finished his condemnation with slow emphasis.

"You will be transported from here to the most convenient city of South America, where you shall be liberated; and you shall take neither a penny in your purse nor other garments than those in which you stand. You shall from this time forth be permitted to speak no word to any man of your race, either in instruction or farewell. You are from this minute as men dead to us and forgotten."

He gestured with his hand; the guard closed round the unfortunate insurgents; they were turned and marched from the chamber; the doors swung to behind them; the shuffling sound of their steps toward the place of their imprisonment died away in the distance, and there was a heavy silence, broken only by a woman's sob. Jim looked up and saw that the king's hands were crossed over his robes, and that his head was bent forward, as though he were uttering prayers for the dying.

Manco's voice, low and weary, aroused him, as he addressed the king and councilors. He turned to the officer, and spoke to him in English.

"The chief councilor honors you, my friend," he said, "by asking your advice. You know for what I have striven. You know what this land requires from the outside world, to preserve its peace. The final vote on throwing its doors open to that world and liberating all ships will be taken from the throne before we leave this chamber. You are no longer an alien, but as one of us you have suffered more

in our behalf perhaps than any other. Will you not speak and add your arguments to mine, while I translate?"

His tone was appealing, and the officer heard in it the sympathy of one who more than any other understood his grief. He arose to his feet, but for the moment was at a loss, with a sense of bitter desolation and bereavement. He stepped down to the front of the throne, past the king's guard which looked at him with friendly encouragement, and over to the very centre. When he began, his voice was of leaden weight, and he listened to it himself as though hearing the argument of some other man.

"Forgive me," he faltered, "for what I may say, if it cuts. I am not entirely myself. I—I—I am alone now!"

He stood before them, very still, with his eyes fixed on a blazonry in line with his vision; and his terrible sorrow pervaded the room as surely as though spirit forms, each mourning for lost friends, had entered and filled the space.

"You have asked my advice. It is nothing, perhaps, worth while; but I say you cannot, in this time and age, cut yourselves loose from the outer world. It is too vast, overwhelming, virile, aggressive. A nation is like a man. He may arrogate to himself a superiority over his fellows, may immure himself in a hermit's solitude or surround himself with armed guards, to prevent the violation of his seclusion; but the power of that outside world, the fingers of that outside world, the influence of that greater force, reach through the entrance of his cave, lean over the shields of his guard, and dominate him as surely as though he were in the heart of the most palpitant and strenuous existence.

"I say—forgive me—you have played the coward's part! Why should you, who have so much that the outer world does not know, who have endeavored to reach a sublime and sane height of knowledge and poise, shirk the responsibility which you owe, which I owe, which every human being owes to his weaker fellow—that of lifting him up to a better plane. Is humanity such a base and trivial thing that it is not worth bettering by those who have arisen beyond its common frailties? Does the god of the Quichua recognize him only, and forever hold aloof from all others? Are you so preëminently above all others of the species that you cannot approach them without having your immaculate garments soiled by contact? Are you, after all, so great that you have nothing more to learn by exchange? What do you want of my advice? Was it not decided by that first vote, in which you were confronted with the necessity of either throwing aside your seclusion or meeting the invasion of that outside world with your radioplanes and violet rays, to redden your hands in the blood of the innocent and ignorant? Are there those among you who still wish to become the greatest murderers that ever became possessed of an unlimited and unmerited power?"

His grief had made him reckless of words; his emotions had unleashed his tongue, and fired all the dormant judgments he had formed of the Quichua into words of accusation and criticism. Now, when he paused, there was a subdued silence, broken only by the scratching of Manco's pencil on the tablet before him. He continued, but in the dull, contained voice of one who has small interest in his subject or in the outcome; speaking quite slowly, as though, his accusations over, he were groping through the chambers of his mind for forgotten things which he had overlooked in the pursuit of more important matters.

"The only invincible conquering force in existence, the one which goes beyond ramparts of steel or engines of violence, is the one which commands the will, the intent and the affection of him whom it would subjugate. The world, crude and brutal as it may seem to you, pays good will for good will after all. It is the coin current between nations as between men. My advice is that you give as others have done, and my prediction is that you will receive as others have received. You are no longer adapted to compete with these

people who have gone ahead, on other lines perhaps than yours, but who have advanced, just the same, through all the centuries in which you have remained buried in your mountains. You should retain as much of your isolation as possible, until you can understand that other life and how to meet it, and adjust yourselves to its demands.

"You can help that alien world, by giving to it those things you possess which will elevate it, and retaining as your secrets those things which could be used by it for barbarism. You can secure, in return, the right to admit upon your shores only those who please you. It would be an easy arrangement, possible through the friendly offices of any greater power—certainly through an alliance with my own country. And by that alliance you need no longer fear invasion; for it could be protective, would be fulfilled, and your peace and comparative seclusion could be maintained, without your being driven to more brutal warfare than has ever been known. I can say nothing more. I have lost enough, God knows, to entitle me to say what I have."

The trend of his speech had gone round in a circle to his own sorrow, and he stopped and moistened his lips as he reverted to it and threatened to become bitter again.

"Ay!" he said slowly. "That simple man who went ahead, who died for his friends and you, with his hand on what he called the end of the rainbow, had a greater attribute than you have shown in all your thousands of years—love for his fellows, belief in them, and a vast fund of knowledge in the one truth that there was, after all, nothing worth striving for so much as love and trust; that in the humblest dwelt some spark worth cultivating, and that the noblest thing was to give, and give, and give—even to life itself! I cannot believe that such an immense sacrifice and such a splendid example were in vain!"

He stopped short, and looked around him with eyes that did not seem to see; his lips closed into a straight, agonized line. He did not return to his seat, but instead bowed deeply to the king and councilor, and turned toward the door. He did not ask permission to retire, although the venerable man on the throne, reading his stress, gave the parting sign.

He stepped away from the councilors' bench and started out, but paused before a spot of sunlight at the foot of the steps. He stopped and looked at it, as though searching for something that had rested there, and found nothing but one tiny stain that had impregnated the marble beneath with an indelible mark of red, that glowed like a ruby cast from a heart of fire.

His hands clenched so quickly that his forearms leaped taut; then, dry-eyed and broken, he passed with bowed head through the exit, while guardsmen saluted him as respectfully as though he were entitled to sovereign honor and were going on a long, long journey.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"SO-LONG! GOOD-BY!"

Jim sat at the desk in his cabin and read the paper which he held in his hand, to see that it was correct in form. He took a pen from the rack before him and signed his name, carefully blotted it, and whirled slowly around in his chair.

"José, my boy," he said, "there is your discharge, as you have wished. You are no longer under my orders. I know you will be happier here with your adopted father, but I dread to bid you good-by."

He fumbled the folded document in his hand for an instant, and, without looking at José, who was seated dejectedly by a small table, went on, in a quiet tone.

"You and I have much in common, have gone through much together, and have a mutual sorrow that none but we can ever quite understand."

His face contracted, his lips twitched, and he hastened to change the subject.

"You are glad to remain?"

"Yes," José answered, but without

sign of happiness. "Glad, because I shall be with and can assist Doctor Pablo, and because some time—when I forget—well, you see, Ayara——"

He stopped, although his face betrayed no confusion. The officer nodded understandingly.

"She does not realize," the Chilian continued, "that I am unworthy. She cloaks me with some of the attributes of the truest friend that ever died for others—sees in me some of his merits—and thinks that, because he, the man who had love for every one, loved me, I must have some virtue which makes me deserving."

"You have said nothing to Ayara, have you, José?" the officer asked kindly.

"No, because—because I cannot. Not now! My heart is too sore, Captain Tipton. It aches with a loneliness that cannot be filled. It cries in the night for the kindly jest, for the generous sympathy, for the clutch of the hand, for the gentle blow of familiarity on the shoulder, for the echo of the deep, strong laugh. Yes—for the very oath of annoyance when things went wrong. I see the deep cañons, the deserted ancient cities, the long white trails. I feel his arms holding me on his broad shoulders when I faint; I hear the compassion of his voice when I suffer, and the patience of his reproach when I, petulant and hot-headed, am angry."

He dropped his head forward on his arms, with the crumpled paper in his hand, verily, as the adventurer had said, a boy; but one who had known a great affection and would cherish its memory without relinquishment.

The officer, with his own head drooping forward, watched him, and, thinking of the youth he possessed, felt himself grown suddenly old. He lifted his eyes upward, and, as their glance wandered across a mirror beyond, he saw a haggard, hopeless, gray-haired man staring back at him with weary looks.

The shriek of a whistle outside brought him back to realities, and he donned his cap and went across to the Chilian. He laid his hand gently on José's shoulder.

"Come, José," he said. "Let us go above and see them off, and—try to forget."

They went to the bridge together, and stood far out in the wing. Ship after ship, liberated, was leaving the bay. They swung around in wide arcs under their own steam, and in turn passed the cruiser, their sirens shrieking jubilant farewells as they headed for the gap in the hills where they were to be guided and towed out to sea by the same power that had brought them in.

Every one on all those outgoing ships appeared happy, the officer thought, and he and the men of the *Seattle* the only ones acquainted with grief. The cruiser alone was clothed in mourning. Even the men of the *Maria Silvera,* on the decks of the *Baltimore,* cheered as they passed, appeased for loss in the knowledge that Azonia would pay in full.

The *Berkeley,* flying the flag of their country, was the last to go. She came quite close, her officers and men waving their hands; the group of scientists clustered together and looked regretfully at the shores of the country which held so much worth studying.

Jim watched until she, too, had disappeared through the gate of the bay, and the cruiser was alone. He gave some perfunctory instructions to Austin, and then, with José, boarded the boat which was to take them ashore for his farewell visit. It was very unlike any of his other trips; for now he had been made a citizen of the nation, and it had been engraved that its doors should never be closed to him.

Throughout the remainder of the day he bade farewell to those who called on him, and dined with Manco and the king, listening to the last instructions which the majestic old man had to offer. It had been decided that to Manco alone would be entrusted the negotiation of an alliance in behalf of Azonia. It had been the wish of the councilors that Doctor Pablo Martinez should be one of the emissaries; but when he learned from Jim that he would probably be subjected to the trials of a world-wide

ovation, he shrank timidly from such an ordeal, and fulfilled his part by writing a long letter to the President of the United States, setting forth the advantages which would accrue to that nation by a compact such as the Quichuas wished. The chief councilor again besought the officer to resign and pass his life in Azonia; but, failing to move him, bade him the good-by that is accorded to friends who may return.

Back in the quiet study which had been his resting place for so many evenings, Jim sat and thought while Ayara, José and the scientist talked to their host. For him the room was filled with shadows. He had the dreaming prescience that Manco's mission would be successful, that the land would never be known to the world at large, and that all who might come thereafter would feel honored in being permitted to study the customs and attainments of the strange nation which declined to be overrun by aliens.

They made their departure on the following morning at an early hour, just as the sun was rising above the eastern peaks behind the city, and while the gorgeous gardens were still covered with the moisture of the night. The whole of Azonia came out and lined the way, to bid them godspeed; and, as an escort of honor, the guardsmen, in full mail, with flying pennants and ringing shields, marched around them to the water's edge. Everywhere were faces which expressed a deep and unbounded sympathy for the officer; for the most minor details of his actions and those of the big, happy man who had been his friend were known to all, and would be told for ages as a legend of the uprising of Choto-Aucco, the warrior who had died for a mistaken belief.

The officer and the councilor stood up in the boat and made their parting salutes shoreward, and then slipped away through the lagoons and out to the cruiser, whose funnels were overhung with slow-curling smoke. They boarded her, and she promptly swung about and followed the path of the other ships through the opening between the hills. She went carelessly past the wreck of the *Maria Silvera;* then opened her valves, shut off steam, and surrendered herself to the rigid power which had become her friend.

There was neither halt nor undue haste on her outward passage, and in a short time she had traversed the tortuous, curving path of the cañon-like channel to the harbor which had witnessed her capture. She slowed down as she emerged from the sharp turn leading into the black pool, and when she gained its centre she felt herself released.

The familiar signals began to work; her screw took hold; she swept majestically through the narrow entrance, and for the first time in many weeks was lifted by a swell and threw the water from her bows. It was as though she tossed her head in the joy of freedom and was springing away into the east, like a happy traveler homeward bound after strange experiences.

For a few minutes Manco, Jim and Austin stood on the end of the bridge in silence; then the officer found himself alone. On the deck below, men had resumed the routine of the open sea, as though no lapse had taken place in its regularity.

Behind him Jim heard Manco and Austin conversing in low tones, and it sounded to him as though the prim commander's voice was filled with an unwonted huskiness. He looked back to the high cliff which hung above the bay, caught the fluttering of handkerchiefs where Ayara, José and Doctor Pablo stood, and waved a sad reply.

Beside them and at their feet he saw the little cairn of stones marking the place where the adventurer was asleep in the great calm. His lips parted in a whisper, and, as he turned away to take up his old life again, the winds caught and carried back his farewell:

"So-long, Billy—God rest you—good-by!"

THE END.

The Odor of Almonds

By Ross Beeckman

There are two kinds of detective story—the one narrating the solution of a previously constructed puzzle; the other presenting the conduct of a real case as it is actually handled by the police. Here is a story of the latter variety, concerning one of the strangest of authentic cases

NEARLY everybody knows and recognizes the odor of bitter almonds; many are aware that the swiftest and most vital poison known to students of toxicology emits that odor. Prussic acid is the deadly toxin referred to.

Thus it was that, when the body of Valerie Selden was discovered in the conservatory of her home in West Fortieth Street, and the smell of bitter almonds in and about the semi-circular room was so strong as to be offensive, the immediate inference was obvious.

"Prussic acid!" said the policeman on that beat, sniffing the atmosphere as he entered the room. He had been hastily summoned by the frightened servant who made the gruesome discovery. He made the observation before his eyes had taken in the surrounding details.

"Prussic acid," remarked Detective Conroy, of the Central Office, when he arrived thirty minutes later. He, too, recognized the odor, and jumped at a conclusion before he gave attention to details. He must not be criticised for the hasty inference. The odor was there; it was recognizable; its relation to a known deadly poison was plain.

"Bitter almonds!" cried the stricken husband who rushed, half clothed, into the unique but charmingly artistic room. "What does it mean, officer? Prussic acid? God help me! It is horrible!" He fell upon his knees beside the body of his wife, sobbing.

Mrs. Selden's maid, Annette, who brought the patrolman into the house, had recovered her wits somewhat later, and bethought herself of her master, who should be the most vitally concerned of all over the tragedy. Mr. Selden had lately emerged from his bath, and was only partly clothed when the maid ran, sobbing and wringing her hands, into his presence. He entered the semi-circular room just in advance of Conroy, whom he did not see.

"Huh! Prussic acid—must have swallowed enough to kill a regiment!" was the comment of Inspector McNaughton, of the detective bureau, soon afterward. Conroy had thought the case of sufficient importance to make use of the telephone to tell the inspector about it, at once; and McNaughton, before leaving headquarters, entered the office of the chief.

"Jack Selden's wife, Mac? Prussic acid?" queried the chief, after hearing the terse statement of the inspector. "Telephonic reports are not always clear. You'd better go up there, yourself. I'll stop there on my way uptown—in about half an hour."

He reached for the telephone as McNaughton went out, got Conroy on the wire, and gave a few sharp orders pending his own arrival at the house. Later, when he entered the conservatory, an hour and ten minutes after the finding of the body by Annette, he, too, made the remark, now bereft of its originality. "Prussic acid? I should say so. The place reeks with it."

The room in which the body was

found was a conservatory in name only. Mrs. Selden, when her husband purchased the house, decided to devote the queer, semi-circular room, with its glass dome and its half-glass outer wall, to her private uses. Flowers and growing plants had no relation to her scheme of utility. Her own exquisite self was the only flower she cared to have blooming there. The glass dome was multi-curtained with gauzelike silk, of many tints and shades of color; the curtains could be drawn upward from below, or might be drawn downward from above, at her will. The half-glass outer wall was fitted in the same manner. The sun and the glass did the rest.

Valerie Selden, exquisite, houri-like, beautiful beyond imagination, could accommodate the color scheme of that room to any costume she chose; she could soften it, or exaggerate it, according to her will and whim; and at night there were deftly arranged incandescent bulbs to perform the functions of the vanished sun. She could enter the room at noon, and quickly transform its aspect to the witching hour of night; she could repair to it after the opera, and, by skillful manipulation of the curtains and the lights, produce the effect of tempered and softened sunlight.

It was a masterpiece of art, that room—the art of a beautiful woman whose ultra-ambition was to emphasize her own matchless charms. Have you watched the shadow-dance effects created by calcium and colored glass? She had done so, and had profited by the lesson. Valerie Selden's one motive in life was to fascinate; perhaps, without realizing it, she charmed herself most. No description can give an adequate idea of the startling and wonderful effects she produced upon herself, upon the costumes she wore, upon the person or persons she chose to entertain.

McNaughton had succeeded in inducing the bereaved husband to return to his dressing room and finish his toilet. Annette was weeping in the parlor. The butler was seated like a graven image upon a chair in the front hall; a policeman was on guard just inside the street door. McNaughton, Conroy, and the officer summoned by the maid were the only living occupants of the room when the chief arrived.

The body of Mrs. Selden had not been touched.

The chief stood beside it, with knitted brows, looking down. Presently he raised his eyes to the multi-curtained half dome; then he directed his glance at the walls. He studied it all, intently, for a time. Then he turned, and faced McNaughton.

"Who knows how to manipulate the scenic effects of this place?" he asked abruptly.

"The maid, very likely."

"Call her."

McNaughton nodded toward Conroy, who returned in a moment, followed by Annette.

"Get busy with those curtains, my girl," said the chief, not unkindly. "Don't move anything else. Let in all the sunlight you can."

"Monsieur wishes me to dispense wis ze curtongs?" she asked, with a sob in her throat.

"Yes; every one of them. I want the full light of day on this scene."

He returned to his former position beside the body, which was on the floor near a low, wide couch that swarmed with pillows, many of them propped into positions where Valerie Selden had placed them. An open book was lying, face down, upon one of them. This the chief picked up, glanced at, and threw aside carelessly, giving his attention again to the body on the floor.

It was lying squarely on its back, the arms outstretched beside it. The left hand was open; the right hand was half clenched, and it had somehow been badly bruised. He noticed, too, that the hair was disarranged—more at the back than at the front, he thought. But the body was in a position which made it impossible to determine that definitely. There was a very faint indication of some sort of mark on the forehead. He could not tell what it was; it did not amount to a bruise. It might have been done if the young woman had sat for a long time with her forehead resting on

her hand, or by lying face down upon a rough surface. The pillows on the couch were sheathed in silk.

The chief dropped upon one knee beside the body, examined the right hand more closely, and breathed close to the lips. He peered at the nape of the neck, as well as its position and the disarrangement of the hair would permit. Several hairpins had fallen from the hair to the rug, and one of them was badly bent. He looked again toward the open book on the pillow; then he rose to his feet.

"Where does that smell of prussic acid come from?" he asked, without turning his head.

McNaughton answered:

"We don't know. She must have spilled some of it around the room before she used it; but neither Conroy nor I can find any trace of a bottle, or vial, or anything which might have held it. He searched before I got here; we both searched again, afterward. Nothing doing. There is no such thing to be found. She might have had it in one of——".

"She didn't have it, Mac; she never had it. This woman didn't kill herself; she was killed. I don't know how she was killed, or what killed her, but I'm pretty confident it wasn't prussic acid, notwithstanding the smell of it—the stench of it—in this room. Who discovered her?"

"The maid; the one who arranged the curtains for you. Do you want her again?"

"No—not now. Where is Selden?"

Conroy answered: "Upstairs. I sent him away to finish dressing. He was wearing only his underclothing, when I got here. He entered the room just ahead of me."

"I suppose this odor in the room convinced you, on the spot, that Mrs. Selden killed herself, didn't it?"

"I am afraid I formed that opinion, sir."

"Well, so did Mac. I wonder if it was Selden's idea, too. Go and ask him, Conroy. This woman was his third wife. They have all died by violence, though none of them was murdered, I believe. We'll look into that, Mac—later on. When did *you* come here, Bronson? Tell me all about it."

The patrolman replied, with slow directness:

"This house is on my beat, sir. I was just passing it when the girl rushed out and called to me. I followed her into the house, and then to this room. As soon as I saw what had happened, I thought of suicide, too. I used the telephone and called up headquarters. Detective Conroy arrived twenty-eight minutes later, from the branch office. The inspector——"

"Never mind that. How'd the girl act, when she called to you?"

"Scared stiff, sir. I made her sit on that chair while I telephoned; and she sat there, crying like a baby. Then, just before Detective Conroy came, she jumped to her feet, and through the doorway, like a flash. I took after her, because I didn't know what she was going to do. Before I was halfway up the stairs I heard her yelling: 'Madame is dead—dead—dead!' and a lot more like it. I heard a man's voice answer her, and I came back to this room, to wait and see what happened."

"Well, what did happen?"

"A man, in his underclothing, came down the stairs on the jump. The minute he entered the room, he cried out: 'Bitter almonds! What does it mean, officer? Prussic acid? God help me! It is horrible!' Detective Conroy was right behind him. The maid must have left the door on the latch when I came in with her."

"That will do. You may return to your duty now. What about the coroner, Mac?"

"Notified. He ought to be here any minute."

The chief nodded. Then he heard the sound of footsteps descending the stairs, and he passed into the hall. Conroy and the bereaved husband had just turned the post of the balustrade.

"I don't want you in there just now, Selden," said the chief, at the same time gesturing to Conroy to pass on. "What is this—the library? Come in here." He held the door open for Mr.

Selden to pass inside the room, followed him, and reclosed the door. "Brace up, Selden. It isn't the first time you've received a severe shock. I want you to reply to a few questions for me, if you can."

"I'll try," Selden answered, with a half groan.

"What reason could your wife have had to lead her to kill herself?"

"Reason? None at all. Could a butterfly have a reason for killing herself? That is what Valerie was—a butterfly."

"Isn't it your impression that she did take her own life?"

"No—that is to say, I cannot believe it. I cannot believe the evidence of my own senses. I suppose she did do it; everything points to that; but—it seems impossible, utterly impossible! You did not know her, did you, chief?"

"No; but I have heard of her, Selden."

"Who has not?" He smiled wanly, and the smile was succeeded by a contortion of pain. "She was the most beautiful woman in the world, I verily believe; but she was a butterfly, as I have said. She adored her own beauty—worshiped at her own shrine. She loved her youth; she reveled in the reflection of her own face in a mirror; she was charmed by her own person, enraptured in the contemplation of her own wonderful eyes; self-hypnotized by the softness of her own skin, the perfection of her own hands and feet; she was a doll, a plaything, as fragile as thinnest glass, as delicate as an orchid. Her greatest joy was in adorning herself, and it made little difference to her whether others were there to see her or not. It was sufficient if she pleased herself. She worshiped her own body; I have sometimes thought that she had no soul. God forgive me for saying such a thing—now. But—you understand! Tell me, could such a character as I have described kill herself? I cannot believe it."

"But it was your first impression, was it not, when you entered the room where she was found?"

"I don't know. I am not sure that I had an impression on the subject at all. I was stunned and crazed—both, if you will accept the paradox. I detected the odor of bitter almonds. It suggested almond oil, almond paste, hydrocyanic acid, prussic acid, poison." Selden bent forward and buried his face in his hands. "I don't think it occurred to me that she had destroyed herself," he went on, raising his head again. "The thought of death was a horror to her. It was never mentioned in her presence."

"When did you last see her alive?"

"Last evening. She had a friend—possibly there were two; I don't know as to that—in the glass extension. She was descending to join them there, when I came down the stairs to go out. I went to the theatre; she had said she did not care to go. It was past midnight when I returned, but I tapped against the door of that room where she—where she is now. There was no answer, and, after tapping again, I went to my own rooms, supposing she had gone to hers, or was asleep in the conservatory. In either case, it was not my wish to disturb her."

"Was it her habit to sleep in the conservatory?"

"She slept anywhere, like a kitten—like the butterfly I have called her—wherever she happened to alight."

The droning of an automobile at the street door interrupted them. It came to a stop, and the bell rang.

"It is probably the coroner," said the chief. "Stay here, Selden, till I summon you. We will look about a bit, inside——"

The chief left the room, met the coroner in the hall, and held a rapid-fire, whispered conversation with him. Then they went together to the conservatory room. Immediately the order was given to lift the body from the floor and put it on the couch. McNaughton and Conroy raised it. As they did so, the head fell backward, hanging straight down, at right angles with the torso.

The chief looked at the coroner, and nodded.

"Neck broken," he said. "Hold still a minute, Mac. I want a look at that back hair before you put her down.

All right—that'll do. How long has she been dead, coroner?"

"Six hours, at least—probably seven or eight—possibly ten."

"Then she might have died at any time between midnight and four, this morning?"

"Yes."

"Take a look at that right hand. It is bruised, you see. Tell me what you think of it."

"It has been badly broken; crushed, rather. It must have been a powerful grip that smashed the bones so; yet it is a delicate, fragile hand, chief."

"Decidedly. Go ahead with your examination, coroner, along the lines I suggested. I'll see you later. Mac, stay here and help the coroner. Conroy, come with me. Selden is in the library now; go in and keep him company. Question him, if you like—but keep him there till I call you. I'm going upstairs."

At the parlor door, he paused for a moment to speak to the maid; then he ascended the stairs.

He entered the suite of rooms occupied by the master of the house—bedroom, dressing room and bath. He looked carefully into each of the rooms, uncorked and sniffed at every bottle and receptacle he could find, and shook his head after each effort. When he entered the bathroom, he stopped and sniffed with increased interest, nodding his head afterward.

Just over the towel rack was a mahogany cabinet, fixed in the wall. He opened it and smelled of each bottle separately, shaking his head and replacing each one where he found it. He closed the cabinet again, and turned about. A bath towel was hanging over the side of the tub. He stepped nearer to it, and the odor he had detected seemed more distinct. He seized the towel, and buried his face in it for an instant.

"Faugh!" he ejaculated, and cast it from him.

Two minutes later he reëntered the library.

"I think you may go to your wife now, Selden," he said brusquely. "Conroy, you may come with me." Outside, on the steps, he paused. "This happens to be the morning for the collection of ashes, Conroy," he said, rather irrelevantly. "Probably there is a can for them, under these steps. It would have been a good place to put the thing, and I don't see how else he could have rid himself of it so thoroughly."

"What thing, sir?" asked Conroy.

"A bottle, or something of the sort, that smells of almonds—bitter almonds. See if you can dig up one, Conroy. Tell the inspector that I'm not going home; I'm going back to the office. Tell him, also, to bring Jack Selden down with him, when he comes. I don't want the man arrested. Mac will find an excuse to induce him to come. No hurry about it. You take charge of the house till you hear from me."

On his way back to Mulberry Street, the chief stopped at the Astor Library, where he passed half an hour in studying a dictionary and a cyclopedia. He read carefully about such subjects as: "Almonds, sweet and bitter"; "Almond oil"; "Almond paste—used as a demulcent"; "Hydrocyanic acid"; "Prussic acid." Bitter-almond oil interested him particularly.

When he left the library and continued on his way to headquarters, he was deeply preoccupied. When he arrived at his desk, he sent at once for a volume marked: "Personal Records—Non. Crim.—Se*.

When he had found the desired entry, he read:

SELDEN, JOHN JACOB. Born 1855, Antwerp, Belgium; English parents. Inherited father's business, 1885. Dealer in wild animals. Retired, 1900, but retained control of business interests. Large fortune. Has since financed circuses, menageries, etc. Came to New York 1900-1. Quiet, unassuming, regular in habits, reticent. Plunger in investments; patron of race tracks, faro banks, etc. Supposed to have financed former gambling houses, No. 1 Ann Street, No. 5 Park Place (see Janey, or January), now long out of existence; also other like resorts at Saratoga, and elsewhere. Reported interest in old Louisiana State Lottery; not established. Shot and killed Adam Wheel-

*There are, or were, two sets of records—criminal and non-criminal.—R. B.

ock, New Orleans, 1902; acquitted, self defense. Three times married: 1. Adéle Lavigne, lion tamer; killed by pet Nubian lion while performing in cage before audience in Paris, France, 1879. 2. Berthe de la Cœur, French bareback rider and performer; mutilated and killed by performing Arabian stallion during an exhibition at Marseilles, France, 1886. 3. Valerie Saint Aubens, professional beauty, daughter of Jean Saint Aubens, former croupier at Monte Carlo. S. went abroad to marry her, July, 1903.

The remainder of the entry was uninteresting; the chief closed the volume and sent it away. Then he leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling until Inspector McNaughton arrived, half an hour later, accompanied by Selden.

"Chief," said the latter, with some heat, "I call it unkind of you—unfeeling, in fact—to want me down here, just now!" McNaughton left the room in response to a signal from his superior. "I hope you won't detain me unnecessarily."

"Certainly not. Be seated, Selden. This is a sad business for you, I know; but—I want your help. Mrs. Selden was your third wife, wasn't she? And all came to violent deaths, I believe. Will you tell me about the other two? It may seem unkind, and rather unfeeling, to ask this of you at the present moment; but—well, I can't permit sentiment to interfere with my duty, you know. You yourself have scouted the idea that your last wife killed herself; I am inclined to agree with you. But, if she did not do it, who, or what, did?"

The chief's air, his manner of speaking, his voice, were all deprecatory; he seemed to be reluctant to question Selden at all, and to do so only because he regarded it as his duty. He contrived to put the man at his ease.

"Do you mind telling me something about the others?" he concluded.

"No. Only, I don't exactly see what they have to do with this unhappy business, chief. My first wife was a lion tamer. I was little more than a kid when I married her—in Paris. I hadn't inherited my father's business then. We had been married less than a year when one of her pets—a Nubian lion, named Cæsar—turned on her. I wasn't there; I had left her half an hour earlier; I didn't know about it till hours afterward."

"Had the lion been docile until then, or was he——"

"Cæsar was like a kitten—until that night. I myself could fondle him; so could the ringmaster. I used to pet him a good deal. Nobody ever understood why he turned on her."

"What became of the lion afterward?"

"He was my property. I had him killed—in fact, I killed him myself."

"When?"

"Right away—as soon as I could get to him after I knew about the tragedy. You would have done the same."

"Most likely. Will you tell me about your second wife, please?"

"That was even worse, chief—because it was entirely unimaginable."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My second wife was a bareback performer. I married her in eighty-three. I gave her an Arabian stallion that was priceless, almost. He was a beauty, and she adored him. She taught him everything. He never wore even a strap when she gave her ring exhibitions with him. One night——"

"Wait. Were you present when that affair happened?"

"No—that is, I was not actually present; I was in the dressing room."

"Go on."

"Berthe always gave the stallion a piece of sugar before she began her act. That night—— Oh, what's the use! Well, the horse was turned into the ring as usual, without a strap on him. When Berthe approached him, to give him the sugar and to stroke his nose, he uttered a scream—did you ever hear a horse scream?—reared up, and struck her with his fore feet. They thought the first blow killed her; but the horse—— Look here, chief, I just can't tell you about it: that's all, I can't do it."

"Did you kill the horse as you did the lion, Selden?"

"I sure did; right there—before that audience, too."

"You have always had more or less to do with animals—wild animals—haven't you?"

"Naturally. I was brought up with them. My father was the only real rival of the Ragenback outfit. I inherited the business. I have always been in it, in a way."

"Always? Are you, now?"

"Not directly; but in a way—yes. I have money invested in that line. The big show men still come to me, when they want something special. But don't confound me with the Selden Brothers, circus men. I'm not related to them. I've got a place in Westchester County where I keep a few choice specimens."

"There seems to be no wild-animal agency about this present tragedy," muttered the chief, as though in answer to a thought. Then, aloud: "Your wife, Valerie, was—how old?"

"Thirty, her last birthday. But she never looked twenty."

"Were you congenial? Did you quarrel?"

"Quarrel—Valerie quarrel? Nobody could quarrel with her. Sometimes I chided her, but she only laughed at me; and by way of reply she would call my attention to a ribbon, a rose, a jewel. She couldn't quarrel; she didn't know how. She was all laughter, ease, luxury; she recognized nothing but beauty—in one form or another. She had no appreciation of anything else."

"How in the world, Selden, did she ever select you for a husband?"

"She didn't. I bought her."

"Bought her?"

"With promises—you understand?—promises that I have kept, too. I am glad of that, now."

"What sort of promises?"

"Money, jewels, dresses—all things, in the way of adornment, that her heart could desire. Permission to do as she pleased in her own home, to dress as she wished, to array herself, to pose, with never a question as to the cost. You see, she was in my line; she was an animal of another sort, a pet, a plaything, a human orchid which grew and thrived on the atmosphere that surrounded her. There was never another woman like her; there could not be. She was a butterfly, and it was an act of cruelty to touch her wings, even with a feather. The simile is good, even to the wings; for her feet were never on the earth."

"Thank you, Selden. I won't keep you now."

As soon as he was again alone, the chief summoned McNaughton.

"Mac," he said, "Selden owns a place in Westchester County where he keeps animals. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Send Savarin up there. I want to know all about the animals that have been taken there, and that have been taken *away* from there, lately—within a reasonable time. Particularly, I wish to know if any one of them has disappeared, or died, recently; and all about it. Put Latrobe on Selden's trail; I want the man watched. That's all. There are no particular instructions about it. He murdered his wife, Mac; I'm satisfied of that much—that is, he had it done for him. He doesn't know that I suspect him—and he mustn't. Tell me what the coroner had to say, after I left him."

"Not much. He found the suggestion of a slight bruise on her forehead; another one was at the back of the neck, just beneath the break. We figured it out that she had been seized by the right hand first, then by her back hair; then the fiend who killed her must have braced one hand against her body, between the shoulders, and jerked her head backward; and then, when the head was far enough back, he let go of the hair and pressed against her forehead till her neck broke. Then he dropped her. If Selden did it, he's stronger than he looks."

"I whispered a request to the coroner, before he went into the room. Did he mention it?"

"Oh, that's all right. He agrees—until you're ready to act. It's suicide. Only Conroy and you and I—and the coroner—are wise to the situation. Now, what?"

"Selden says that somebody was with her last evening, when he went out to

the theatre. It is probably true. Detail one of your men to get the names of all persons who were in the habit of going there—particularly her male friends. Find out who was there last evening. The knowledge might suggest a motive. She was a great deal younger than Selden; she may have tired of him. Butterflies are not constant to any flower. There should be an Apollo Belvedere sort of a chap somewhere about; look for one. You'll find him, I think. Wait a moment. I am going to write a cable message which I wish you to read and send."

The chief turned to his desk, wrote rapidly for a few minutes, and gave the message to the inspector. The latter read it through, peered at his chief over the top of the paper, read it again, folded it and put it in his pocket, pursed his lips, and said:

"It's great! I never thought of that. It's true, too—I'll bet my head!"

It was Savarin who found the "Apollo Belvedere." The man might well have claimed the mythological title of Hercules, as well. He was the superintendent in charge of Selden's Westchester farm—just a big, powerful, possibly savage human animal, half Italian, half Irish—James Ryan by name. He had been at the house on the evening of the "suicide." He often went there—once a week, at least; sometimes oftener. Oh, yes; Mr. Selden was cognizant of his goings and comings—welcomed him, in fact. Valerie's death had affected him terribly. He couldn't account for it.

All this, and much more, he confided to Savarin.

Sure, Selden had known he was there that night; he always knew when anybody was there.

The animals? Oh, yes, they were always coming and going; only there was, here and there, one which Selden always refused to part with—a Bengal tiger, a black leopard, an ape of the ourang species. They had been there ever since his own employment—three years, and more. They were docile; quite so. Selden petted them all; so did Ryan. Valerie had visited the farm sometimes; *she* petted them, too—particularly the ape. She was a little timid with the others. It was strange, too, about that ape; he died mighty sudden, when nothing seemed the matter with him; died the same night that Valerie killed herself; was found so, in his cage, the day after; but Mr. Selden hadn't been told of it. He'd had enough to bear, and he prized the ape. No; Selden hadn't visited the farm since several days before Valerie's death.

It was more than a week after the funeral when the chief received specific replies to his cable messages. They had been acknowledged, but with a request for time to obtain facts. Conroy had found, in the ash can under the stairs, the fragments of a broken bottle that smelled of almonds. Ryan had been taken to the chief, and questioned. A dozen men had been detailed to different duties in connection with the case. Almost a month elapsed before the chief was prepared to act. He had been, in person, twice to the farm in Westchester County; and Ryan—well, Ryan had assisted him each time. Then, one day, the chief sent for Mr. Selden.

"I have two friends visiting me who have expressed a desire to see your animals," he said. "Will you take us out there and show them to us?"

Selden consented at once, of course. The chief, with his two friends—both Frenchmen, by the way—accompanied by McNaughton and Savarin, arrived at the farm at half past two in the afternoon. It was, to a day, a month after Valerie Selden's death.

There were twoscore animals at the farm; some new arrivals, some that had been brought there less recently; others, notably the tiger and the leopard, that were always there. These two occupied a small building by themselves, their cages separated by a ten-foot passage between them. Each cage filled, entirely, its own side of the small house.

The chief whispered to Ryan just before they entered that building, and the latter nodded in reply; but he said, under his breath: "It's mighty dangerous, sir. More than likely Bruno'll kill him before I can shove in the screen."

"We must risk it," replied the chief.

"These are my beauties," Selden told his guests, a moment later. "They are my pets. Why, I used to take my wife into Bruno's cage. He's the tiger; she was a little bit afraid of the leopard. Would you care to venture into Bruno's cage, chief?"

"No, thank you. I'd like to see you do it, though—if you will. My friends would like to see it, too."

"Certainly," said Selden, at once. "Just wait till I put on a jacket and get a whip. Ah, Ryan, you have them ready, I see. What are you going to do with that screen?"

The "screen" was formed of steel bars, and could be shoved through the middle of a cage, thus separating it into two compartments.

"I thought I'd have it in readiness, sir," was the reply. "There are strangers here, you know; and Bruno hasn't been well lately."

"No? Why didn't you tell me? Now, gentlemen, if you will stand back a little—thank you."

He passed to the end of the cage farthest from the tiger, opened a small door, and sprang inside. As he did so, the tiger raised its head.

Instantly the chief drew a large syringe from one of his pockets, and from it shot a steady stream of liquid into the cage—not at the tiger, but at Selden, who was half deluged by it. At the same instant Ryan shoved the screen through the bars, and one of the Frenchmen fastened the little door by which Selden had entered.

The effect of it all was terrifying. Had Ryan been less quick with his screen, it would not have availed; had the little door remained unfastened from the outside, the plot of the chief might not have carried through. As it was, the scene was awful, while it lasted.

The tiger bristled, roared, distended his jaws, and leaped forward all at once, the instant he smelled the odor of that liquid—the oil of bitter almonds. But the screen barred his way, and he fell back again to the floor of the cage, only to throw himself again and again against the protecting bars, with savage fury, terrible to see. The man on the opposite side of the screen, drenched with the scent of bitter almonds, cowered and shrank, and tore his hair, crying to them to let him out; beseeching them, cursing them; storming at the little door with his bare hands until they bled—until at last he fainted away, and the chief opened the door and dragged him outside. They carried him away, and, when he revived, he found himself surrounded by the two Frenchmen, McNaughton, Sevarin and the chief.

"Selden," said the last, "this gentleman is the chief of police of Paris; this other is the chief of police of Marseilles. We are waiting to hear just how you made use of the ape when your wife was killed—and of the Nubian lion, and the Arabian stallion, in the cases of your other wives."

The man, now thoroughly broken in spirit, told all.

The odor of bitter almonds is naturally offensive to most animals. Once, when Selden was a boy, an old trainer of his father's had said in his presence: "If I wanted to kill anybody, I'd train one of my beasts to do it. I'd teach him to get into a fury at the odor of almond paste; they hate it, anyhow."

Almond paste is a demulcent that is much used in treating the skin of animals in confinement. By rubbing it on their noses, they can be driven to fury; by mixing cayenne pepper with it, they can be maddened; by inflicting upon them some sort of petty torture which they cannot combat, every time it is used, they are taught to resent the odor of it as they would an outright attack. Weeks—nay, months—of this sort of training will render any animal unsafe to approach, if the hated odor is anywhere in evidence.

Selden had tired of his first wife, had recalled the words of the old trainer, and had got rid of her; the second had met the same fate when she palled upon him; the third——

"Valerie cared for nobody but herself, until Ryan came," he told them. "I could bear with her not loving me, but I could not bear that she should be at-

tracted to another. Ryan filled her ideal of what a man should be. I could stand that, too, until she began comparing me with him, to my own disadvantage. She made fun of my white hair; she called me a little old man, and made faces at me—and always laughed. I couldn't stand it any longer. I had trained the tiger, the leopard, and the ape. I used the ape.

"I gave Ryan a night off, knowing that he would spend the evening with Valerie. I thought of killing him, too; but I was afraid to attempt so much. I came out here and got the ape, after he had gone. I didn't attend the theatre that night; I only pretended to do so. I took the ape to my own room, and waited until Ryan had left the house; then I took the animal downstairs to Valerie's conservatory.

"I opened the door softly, and found that she was asleep; so I put him inside the room, and, when he turned to follow me out again, I squirted the volatile almond oil all over him—into his eyes, on the floor, everywhere. It soon evaporates, you know. I had a syringe which I had filled from a bottle that I afterward threw in the ashes. I waited till two in the morning in the library, in the dark; then I went again to the conservatory. I knew that the ape would attack me, too; but I was ready.

"An ape will always come at you with his mouth open. I used the syringe again; only, this time, it contained prussic acid. If I hadn't shot it straight, he would have killed me, too. I brought his body back to the farm, as I had taken him away, in a carriage. Then I returned to the city, to my home. That is all, save that I could not entirely rid myself of the odor until I had taken a bath and put on fresh underclothing.

"You see, when I killed the ape, I meant to leave his body in that room, to be found with hers. I had fixed it up to say that he had escaped and followed Ryan; anyhow, nobody knew that I had been at the farm. But, when I looked inside the room and saw that Valerie's body was not mutilated—I could not see that it bore any marks at all—the odor of the almond oil suggested that suicide would be the natural theory of the police. So I brought the body of the ape back here, and put it in its cage."

A WILY BIRD

ONE of the most sagacious of birds is certainly the bee cuckoo or moroc, a little bird very like the sparrow.

It is found in various parts of Africa, where wild bees abound; and, being unable to help itself to the honey which is its favorite food, it resorts to human aid.

Having discovered a swarm of bees, it flies to the nearest habitation and attracts by its cries of "Cherr—cherr—cherr!" the attention of some of the natives. It then flies off in the direction of the nest, uttering its cry, and waiting for its followers to overtake it. Should they be tardy, it returns to meet them, and seems as though trying to urge them on to greater speed, the natives answering it with a low whistle.

SLOT MACHINE INSURANCE

SLOT machines for vending accident insurance policies have been erected in many cafés and hotels. The purchaser places a dime in the slot, and pulls a lever. Out comes a card with a counterfoil attached. On this counterfoil, which is already stamped, the insured writes his name and address, and after posting it he has the benefit of insurance for a week dating from the time stamped thereon by the sending post office. He retains the card on which his contract is printed. These policies insure against most perils of the city, providing indemnity for various injuries, and one thousand dollars in the event of death.

Two Thieves

By Gym Bagley

Showing how an old hand and a comparative novice brought off a grand coup, and illustrating once more the truth of the maxim: "It pays to advertise"

RED PORTER, burglar of the first class, stared at the newspaper he was holding, made a readjustment of its distance from his vision, and stared again. Then he breathed forth an exclamation such as burglars use in moments of astonishment, but which will not be chronicled here.

That at which he stared might well raise the eyebrow of surprise in others of a less interesting calling than that of Mr. Porter. It was an advertisement, conspicuously displayed, and read:

WANTED: An expert burglar on a job with little or no risk. References not necessary. Come with tools prepared to go to work. Address CONFIDENCE, this office.

"I suppose that guy thinks he's funny!" muttered Mr. Porter. And he threw down the paper with an air of disgust. Then he gulped the red liquor at his elbow, and picked up the paper again.

"Wonder what's the game, anyway? Where's the joker?"

Mr. Porter, despite his disgust, was evidently puzzled. He was an artist in his line; but that line, while a crooked one, had well-defined limitations, and anything new in it, such as this strange advertisement, gave Mr. Porter a shock. His was a mind that did not readily grasp things which had not heretofore come within the range of his experience. He had been tipped off to many a job in the orthodox way, but never before had he known or heard of any one advertising in the public prints for a workman in his trade.

Mr. Porter scratched his head. But, though the top of it was bright enough—a brightness of hue which gave to him one of his names—it failed to loosen any solution of the mystery. He ordered more liquor, and threw it into himself with one movement; but that did not soften the knots in the problem.

Finally he murmured: "I give it up; but I'll take a chance."

Whereupon he arose, thrust the paper into his pocket, went to the barroom, and presently returned with a sheet of writing paper and an envelope.

Mr. Porter was always willing, even anxious, to take a chance. Taking chances was, indeed, a part—a very considerable part—of his chosen profession. And, while an experiment might not look clear to his mental vision at its inception, he was ever ready to trust to his physical endowments to bring an untried issue to a successful conclusion.

So, with much time given to thought, and much labor, in which inspiration was coaxed from the handle of the pen through the process of chewing on it, an answer was indited to the advertisement. In it a meeting was assigned in the same back room of the dive wherein Mr. Porter was now still puzzling over the outcome of his reply.

"It couldn't 'a' been no bull pulled that ad," he thought, as he got up to mail his letter. "An', if it was, what's the difference? He couldn't make no pinch, as he ain't got nothin' on me. W'en I tells him I writ the answer for

a joke, what's he goin' to do about it? Nothin'."

Mr. Porter buttoned up his coat, and went out into the winter night.

On the following evening, our enterprising burglar was lounging in the barroom of the dive, when a stranger to the place and vicinity came in with a nervous hesitancy and peered about, a frightened look on his pale face.

"I—I—perhaps——" he stammered, and stopped.

He was about to say: "Perhaps I have made a mistake," but he seemed to muster up some semblance of courage, and approached the man behind the bar.

"Pardon me," he said, in a voice that quavered in spite of his attempts to keep it steady. "Pardon me, but do you know a gentleman named Mr. Porter? I was to meet him here. This is the place, I think."

The stranger drew a letter from his pocket, as though to consult it; but the bartender broke in:

"This is the joint, all right. Mr. Porter was expectin' a gent. He's upstairs. He'll be down in a minute."

This delay had been planned in order that Porter might have a chance to "size up" the man who wanted to put a burglar to work. While he was addressing the bartender, Porter never took his eyes off him, and the scrutiny was evidently satisfactory; for now Porter came forward.

"I guess I'm the guy yer lookin' fer," he said. "Come in here."

The stranger followed the burglar into the back room, not without some hesitation. Porter noticed the hesitation, and paid to it a meed of his contempt, silent but nevertheless expressive. He pulled out a chair at a table in a corner, and motioned the stranger to a seat.

As the two men sat opposite, eying each other, the one with ill-concealed fear, the other with cool inquiry, they formed a contrast decided enough to mark them for beings of different worlds—as indeed they were.

The stranger was slight of build and pale of visage, with a Vandyke beard, closely trimmed, of the color of straw. In years he was probably forty. He took out a card, and passed it timidly across the table to the burly ruffian opposite.

Porter gave the card a careless glance, and said: "You're the mope what puts that ad in the paper wantin' a burglar—ain't yer? What's the lay?"

There was nothing in Porter's manner to incite fear, and the stranger took on a more decided front.

"As you see by my card," he said, "my name is Roderick Brooks. You don't know me, but I know you now—that is, by reputation."

Porter looked up quickly, and his beady eyes narrowed. "How d'yer know me?" he demanded; and the sudden change to roughness in the tone made Brooks start.

"Oh, nothing to your discredit, Mr. Porter," he hastened to say, with a deprecatory raising of his hand—a smooth, white hand, unused to toil. "Nothing to your discredit, I assure you. It is the knowledge of your—your business that——"

Brooks paused, and looked around the room. It was empty, save for himself and the burglar. "I have a business proposition to make to you"—he lowered his voice—"but it wouldn't do to have it overheard."

"Yer safe enough here," Brooks assured him. "They ain't nobody aroun'. An' if they was, it'd make no difference. Nobody in this dump never hears nothin' he ain't wanted to hear. Yer can bank on that. Hurry up and pull the stuff fer which yer writ that ad. That's what I want to git at. What's the game?"

Brooks still hesitated; but something in the burglar's face showed him that he had gone too far to retreat. He moistened his lips and, leaning over the table, said, in a low, tense voice:

"I think I can trust you. I have heard that there is honor among thieves—that they will not betray each other. That is so, is it not?"

"Sometimes," replied Mr. Porter dryly.

"What I am about to say to you," continued Brooks, "would place me in your power." He paused. The burglar's reply regarding the honor among thieves was not so very reassuring.

"Yer don't have to say it," broke in Porter. "Not unless yer want to. But I can put yer wise to one thing—Red Porter never squealed on a pal. I'm no copper."

"I think I can trust you," repeated Brooks. "You have too great a reputation in your business to transgress any of its ethics." This was said insinuatingly, and, although the latter part of the sentence was Greek to him, the burglar received the flattery with a pleased grin. "What I am going to say to you is a confession. You and I meet on a common equality. I, too, am a thief."

If Brooks expected the other to receive this statement with horror or even any degree of surprise, he was mistaken. Porter only leaned back against the wall and laughed.

"An' yer lookin' fer a pal," he burst out finally, bringing his chair back to its four legs. "An' yer has the nerve to advertise fer one. You—I'd like to have a guy like you on the lookout if I was on a job."

Porter thought this such a rare joke that he burst out into another noisy laugh.

Brooks waited for the other to compose himself. "You mistake me entirely. I have a very different proposition to make to you."

"Well, yer a long time gettin' down to cases," retorted Porter. "An', while yer waitin', why don't yer buy a drink? Yer look as if yer had the price."

Neither spoke while the drinks were being served. After the waiter left them, Brooks took a sip of the liquor. It made him cough. He evidently was not used to that particular brand.

"As yer ain't stacking me up fer a pal, just go ahead an' spring yer proposition. I'm a-listenin'."

"Here it is. I am the cashier of the South Bingham Bank. I have——"

Porter interrupted him with a quick look. "Oh, that's the lay? I'm on. Yer been dippin' inter the bank's damper."

"For over a year," Brooks went on hurriedly. The plunge over, he could speak with less hesitancy. "I have been helping myself to the bank's funds; I am in its debt fifty thousand dollars or more. I have lost it all in speculation. There is no possible chance for me to return this sum. Sooner or later the discrepancy will be found out, and then I will be a ruined man."

The other thief of other methods nodded assent to this, and remarked: "Yep, an' you'll be all togged out in a nice striped suit, an' have nothin' to do fer a few years but learn the laundry business. But what do yer come to me fer? Where do I come in?"

"You can save me."

"Me save yer? What the——"

"You can save me," reiterated the cashier, "if you will. And at the same time put more money in your pocket than you ever saw. And without any risk. With absolutely no risk to you."

Porter looked puzzled. "This is a new one on me. But go ahead."

"There is in the bank's vaults now over half a million dollars. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars of it is in cash—in banknotes. Would you like to have those banknotes?"

"Don't talk like a dope," blurted forth the burglar, now intensely interested. "Would I like to have 'em? I'd croak yer this minute fer a tenth of 'em." He reached across the table, his fingers working, as though Brooks had the money with him.

The cashier shrank back at the fierce gesture, and his pale face went a shade paler.

Seeing this, Porter drew his gnarled hands back; but his lips were drawn away from his yellow teeth, giving him the look of a hungry wolf. He thrust the hands deep in his pockets, as an evidence that he meant the other no harm, and said, with an attempt at a laugh which died in his throat:

"Don't git scared, old pal. Yer too valuable to kill. What's yer game? Spiel it off; fer it looks good to me now."

Brooks recovered from his fright and went on, still speaking rapidly: "You

know, South Bingham is a small town, and the people go to bed early. If you will come up there and break into the bank and get away with all the money and securities in the vault, the robbery will cover my peculations. No one will ever know then that I took any of the bank's funds, and I will be saved. Even if you cannot negotiate the securities, you will have one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash—enough to keep you luxuriously anywhere for the rest of your life, without the necessity of your taking any further risks in the pursuit of your profession."

The burglar's small eyes glittered, but he spoke calmly. "Yer pulled somethin' about no risk in this job. What was that?"

"I will leave the door of the bank so that you can get in without any trouble. I will also have the watchman out of the way. The vault doors I will leave so that you can get to the money drawers. All I ask is that you make some show of breaking into the bank. Drill a hole in the safe and use a little powder, or whatever it is that you employ. You see, so long as it looks like a real burglary, it will be my salvation." Brooks bent forward, with tense eagerness. "What do you say—will you do it?"

Porter sprang to his feet. "Will I do it? W'en'll yer be ready to fix the doors?"

A sigh of relief escaped from Brooks. "If you run up to South Bingham and locate the bank in the daytime, I could get word to you——"

Porter broke in on him. "Don't fret yer worry about that. I'm wise where the bank is, all right. I looks that burg over before. I can spot the bank in the dark—the darker the better."

"Well, then," chimed in Brooks eagerly, "say to-morrow night. Before midnight I will have everything arranged. After the town clock strikes twelve, all you have to do is to walk into the bank, and walk out a rich man. And you will make the place look as if you had to break in?" He searched the other's face with intense, pleading eyes. "I can depend upon you for that?"

The strong thief grasped the weak one by the hand, making him wince with the pressure he put upon it. "You can bet yer life on it. Red never tossed no pal, an' yer the best one I ever had." For the first time since their meeting, the burglar gazed at the cashier with something akin to admiration. "An' yer sure had yer nerve with yer w'en yer stuck in that ad."

It was a dirty night in South Bingham when Red Porter skulked in the shadow of a doorway and waited for the town clock to toll off the hour. There was a cold, cutting sleet, driven by a gale that made even the rugged Porter shiver and pull his coat tighter about him.

The whole town was evidently asleep; for to the intently listening ears of the waiting burglar no sound came, save the howling of the wind and the swish of the sleet as it beat against the buildings. It was just the kind of a night that Porter would have picked out for the work he had to do, and while he shivered he rejoiced thereat.

"It's a bet even the bulls is under cover," he muttered. "W'y don't that bloomin' clock strike?"

As though in answer to his wish, the stroke of a bell cut in above the noise of the storm.

"There she goes! Now for the cush." Porter began fumbling at the outside door of the bank. "He's a funny kink, that cashier. It's a wonder he didn't want me to split with him. But he's so scared o' bein' found out an' sent away, he's willin' to let go everythin'. If——"

There was a lull in the storm, and Porter's meditations were suddenly interrupted by the sound of footsteps crunching on the icy pavement. The first thought that went hurrying through his brain was that he had been led into a trap. A muffled curse rose to his lips. The door had readily yielded to his hand, and was now half open. The burglar was used to emergencies; and to act quickly was, with him, second nature. After all, the approaching footsteps might mean nothing—some

one passing, even a policeman. He stepped inside the door, and closed it softly. Then he drew a revolver from his pocket and waited, with his ears strained.

He cursed the storm which drowned all other sounds. The minutes passed; but still Porter stood in the darkness, his hand clutching his weapon, and listened. He was growing impatient with inaction. Carefully opening the door and keeping in its shadow, he looked out on the wind-swept street. No one was in sight.

"Some guy on his way," he muttered, relieved. "Brooks was on the level, all right."

Then he closed the door, bolted it, and flashed his lantern. He found no difficulty in reaching the vault, and made his preparations to "break" into it. It never occurred to him to get the money in a hurry and escape, where delay might mean detection and the loss of a fortune—to say nothing of imprisonment and, perhaps, death. He had given his word to put the burglar sign on the vault, so that his partner in this crime would not be found out as a thief; and he was going to do it. There was nothing else for him to do but that. That was the bargain.

So Red drilled a hole in the safe, and ripped off the combination with a stick of "puff paste." Then he searched the inner boxes for the banknotes—the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash—and the securities. All the doors of the vault inside were wide open. They had been left open for him.

Suddenly a hoarse cry broke from his lips, a cry that might have been heard above the rattle and swirl of the storm outside. It was a cry not good to hear. Nor would it have been well for the cashier to have been forced now to look upon the fury of that face, glaring with bloodshot eyes into the open vault.

The vault was bare, save for one two-dollar bill which lay conspicuously on the floor.

That morning all South Bingham was startled by the discovery of the bank burglary. The loss was so great that the bank was forced to suspend—and it never resumed. Cashier Brooks took the wreck so much to heart that the good folk of South Bingham started a subscription fund for him. His all was in the bank. He told them, with tears streaming into his Vandyke beard, that he could no longer remain to look upon the scenes where his life work had begun and had so cruelly ended. He must go away to begin anew, if indeed the shock did not end his life.

And, far away from South Bingham, Cashier Brooks began a new career—with the bank's capital—while his partner, the burglar, returned to his haunts, to meditate on how little he really knew regarding the fine points of his profession.

How Red Porter and Cashier Brooks came face to face again, and how matters were evened up between the arch-plotter and his dupe, is another story which may some day be told. For, in his cunning, Brooks had reckoned without that tide of human affairs which turns inexorably at the full and ebbs away, leaving stranded the man who formerly rode on its swell to fortune.

SMALLEST WATCH IN THE WORLD

A WEALTHY resident of Moscow owns the smallest watch in the world, which once belonged to the last Empress of Brazil. It was made in Geneva by the famous watchmaker, Zogelin, and cost over twenty-five thousand dollars. It has a diameter of one-fifth of an inch, and is set in an artistically worked finger ring, which is studded with diamonds. If the watch be taken out of its ring case, it can be set in the mouth of a cigarette holder. Zogelin is said to have worked three years on it, and to have weakened his eyesight permanently in the task.

The Cannonball, Limited

By Captain Q. M. Garnett

Ten dollars a day is a good stipend, even for a human cannonball. But every gun recoils on the discharge, and projectiles have sometimes a trick of ricochetting that may cause embarrassment to somebody

HE was a strange fellow, a slant-eyed man with a slouch-hat and whiskers. When he came into Red Bill's boarding-house, the men assembled there were not sure of him; they could not place him at once—as nearly all seamen can size up a stranger. They were not sure but that he was a plain-clothes man, a policeman looking after the welfare or illfare of certain mates who had made rough-house in some of the deep-water ships—the wind-jammers from around the Horn.

This man was certainly a freak; he appeared to be a cross between a steamboat deck-hand and a coal-passer, or a pilot out of a job.

Therefore, the men at Red Bill's dirty tables took a fresh grip on their jug-handles and looked at each other without comment.

"Be you the boss?" asked the fellow of Red Bill, who stood behind his bar with a bottle in one hand and a bung-starter in the other, ready for anything that might happen.

"That's me," said Red Bill, laying down the bottle and pushing back his flaming hair to get a better view of the subject evidently coming under discussion.

"Got any likely sailormen hereabouts?" asked the man again.

"There's a room full of ocean laborers—I dunno as you'd call 'em sailormen in particular—but some of them has seen the main-decks of ships. What's yore lay, if I ain't too inquisitive of yore affairs. Runner fer some ship—mate—what?"

"No, I ain't exactly a runner for no ship," said the man slowly. "But I'm lookin' for a nextr'or'nary man, a man what's got sand enough to be climbin' about ropes what's high in the air, a feller what's used to rough play an' ain't afeard of bein' shot up—tossed about some."

"Bein' shot up some—hey? Well, stranger, don't you know that's sort of putting it strong? Don't you know shootin' is a strong game, a game not for decent sailormen? No; I ain't got no men for no sech lay as that—'n' you kin let go both hooks on it and give her the last link."

"Well, this ain't no fracas I'm telling about; this ain't no bad lay. I'm tellin' you a game—see? I'm tellin' you of a fair way for a man to make a good ten-dollar bill every day he lives while——"

Red Bill cut him off with a grin. "Say, cully, don't come no flimflam shoot-off in here. 'Twon't go—see?" And he raised the bung-starter above the level of the bar so that it was in plain view.

"Say, this is business! Do I look like a flimflam? Do I look like a bunk?"

Red Bill surveyed him carefully for a moment, and studied the man. He was not quite convinced. "No, I dunno's you do," he admitted; "but, say, you come into me with a mighty strange shoot the first-off—what?"

"Well, it's like this here," said the fellow. "I'm with the big show what's

playin' down near the shore, 'n' we're doin' a big shootin' stunt—see? We fire a man out'n a gun—a cannon——"

"Good lord! Be you a crazy man?" growled Bill, surveying him anew. "A bug, for sure—a bug!"

"Naw! Nothin' doin'!" growled the man. "Lemme finish. We fires a man out'n a big cannon—with a *little charge of powder*—see? Makes a big noise 'n' smoke, but jest shoots the man up in the air high enough to grab a line, which any sailorman could——"

"Say, cully, cut it short! Bill, Sam—hey, there, Jules Braubain, you son of a sea-scutt!—come over here 'n' listen to the bug!"

The men came over to the bar and shambled slowly up to the stranger, eying him askance, but with a certain levity which told of their belief in Red Bill's diagnosis. A "bug" was a thing to play with; for "bug-house," or crazy, meant that the poor fool was harmless.

"What's the lay?" asked Jules, staring at the stranger with insolence.

"Oh, I'm lookin' for a man to shoot up, to fire out'n a cannon down at the show—any kind of game sailorman what isn't afeared of a bit of noise 'n' smoke will do. There ain't no danger gettin' hurted; we jest fires him out'n a cannon made fer the shot—fires him out in the air where he gets foul of a line way up in the top of the tent—'n' any sailorman what's handled line kin do the stunt if he don't get flustered and fall down. Jest grab the line and hang on——"

"There ain't nothin' bug wit' dat," said Jules. "Sounds likely enough. I hearn tell of some sech trick, and I don't believe it's so blamed dangerous. I'm the little game one, anyway—how much did you say the lay would set up?"

"Ten bucks a day 'n' feed," said the stranger.

"Lead me to it," said Sam.

"Nix, it's mine," said Bill, a Sou'wegian seaman of twenty-five.

"I spoke it first; so I take it on—see?" said Jules menacingly. "Ten iron men a day is good for me—ten wheels—ten bucks, you call him. What will you take of the liquids, Mr.——"

"Call me Brown—Brown's my stage name, d'ye mind," said the stranger, "'n' if you're on, why, the drinks is on me. I sets 'em up all around, but I wants this thing kept quiet. I don't want the whole sea-front to get wise to who's doin' the stunt—see? You are Count de Feu, Monsieur Jules—Count de Feu. Get next to that?"

"It is of the red liquor I'll drink, my dear William. Observe me, the gent of the occasion," said Jules.

A roar of applause followed from the rest of the men, who had drawn near.

"Yes, we'll all drink to the Count de Feu."

Ten minutes later the stranger, Mr. Brown, was leading Jules away. They were allowed to go finally without molestation, in spite of the uproarious shouts of the men who knew Jules.

Sam and Bill drank in gloomy silence. They were soured. The graft seemed too good to them to miss; but Jules had spoken first, and the boss was with him. They had lost the fat job, and would probably sweat out the summer aboard some dirty packet at twenty per month; while Jules, the Count de Feu, swelling out his little chest and strutting about the shore of Coney, would have much to drink and little work. It was not fair. They reasoned that he had no prior rights; and with the sullenness developed they finally opened their minds to each other, and agreed that Jules should pay for his usurpation of the title which should have fallen to one or the other of them.

"Blamed little half-breed blue-nose!" growled Sam. "We'll go down and have a try at him—Count de Feu!"

"I reckon we'll get up with him afore he goes to weather of us," said Bill. "I got a bit of a scheme we'll talk over as we go down to the show."

Jules was a well-built seaman. He was short and stocky of build, very strong about the shoulders; and his grip was like the set of a vise upon a bit of steel.

It will be seen that he was well fitted

for the job of the Count de Feu. To catch and hold a line near the top of a tent, and to slide down it to the earth below, was but child's play for him. Of course, if he missed the line, the safety net would be his refuge; and into it he would necessarily fall from the height of his flight through the air.

It must be remembered that the charge of powder was not the real motive force which sent him flying upward. The powder made a smoke and noise, but this was fired at the instant when a steel spring of immense size was released. This, with his feet held stiffly upon the "wad," would hurl him out of the short, big-bored cannon.

Inspection of the weapon was denied the curious; but, as it was of iron and looked extremely wicked and warlike, and as its report was like the crash of thunder—the explosion passing around the real bore and out through an enclosing shell—the pleasure-loving folk accepted it at its advertised rating, as "a terrible engine of war."

The real Count de Feu—or, strictly speaking, Sullivan Magoon, sometime able seaman in the packet *Sunnerdun,* of the Dun line—had fallen off the water-cart a few days before Jules took up the job. "Bill" Magoon had a thirst like that of a famished desert camel, and he had taken what money he could lay hand to and proceeded to allay the irritation with all possible despatch. Meeting with a seaman from the battleship *California,* he had made some sneering remark at the patriot's ability to surround his portion of the fluid; and the argument had ended by their mixing it roughly, both the patriot and himself being haled before the court and locked up to await the result of the liquid's effects.

The show must proceed; and after trying in vain to get him out on bail the manager had decided that, after all, while it was known that the Count de Feu was the only man in the wide world who could or would dare to do the "terrible and nerve-destroying act," he could easily replace him with another count by a quick canvass of the South Street resorts.

The fact that Magoon was long, thin, and red-headed was of small consequence. Folk soon forgot these small details, and lightning changes must be explained by the ever-ready press-agent or "barker," who could easily tell folks in a most convincing manner that black was white—and apparently make them believe it.

Jules entered into his new duties with the enthusiasm of a schoolboy going fishing. It was a small thing to catch a line—or fall into the safety net. What did he care for risk—he, Jules, the sailor? It was a joke. But when he came to face the "engine of terrible warfare," he received a bit of a shake. The cannon looked dangerous.

"What! Do I get in the terrible thing?" he asked.

"Sure, Mike!" said Brown. "Jimmy, get the powder charge fixed and tell the boss the new count is ready for the trial. Are you afraid, friend Jules?"

"It is the nix on fear that I have," said Jules. "*Sacré tonnère!* But do I get fired out of that infernal machine? Is it to hell or heaven I go? Name of a dog, Brown, my friend, you must be careful. And who is the fair one so beautifully tighted—dressed, I might say—but what a perfect figure of a woman! What! Is it to her fair arms so beautifully rounded and white that I am fired—yes? Well, fire ahead! You can't shoot too soon for me. Send me to her embrace while she dangles in midair."

"Oh! That's the Countess de Feu—catches you as you sail away into the realm of space," said Brown. "Devilish pretty woman, 'n' that's a fact; but don't try any funny stunts with her, or you'll be sorry."

"It is a serious matter, indeed, with such a woman," said Jules. "*Mon Dieu!* But one might go much farther than the cannon will shoot before finding so much beauty! I might have a wife in so fine a female—what! Married—it is of no consequence. One may marry more than once in this life, and I am sure I could strangle her husband with these two good hands in less time than I'm wasting telling you about it.

But put me within the gun and let her go!"

"Don't mind the powder smoke," said the boss, who had come to view the trial performance. "Keep your eyes wide open and catch the hands of Sadie McCann when she holds them to you—see? Don't you worry about her letting you slip. She'll get a hold of you. Let her slide!"

Bang! There was a mighty crash, a whirl of blue smoke—more than ten times as much as the amount of powder used would ordinarily produce—and Jules went straight for the white and rounded arms of Miss McCann—the Countess de Feu.

Sadie gripped him as he reached her, leaning from a swinging bar meanwhile.

"There, you gazabo, you needn't fear you'll fall! I've got you, all right," she whispered tersely. "My, what hard hands you have—sailor, of course! They always get 'em in this stunt." She drew him to the bar, where he soon sat alongside her—very close, for the bar was but three feet long.

"It is pleasure to be saved from so horrible an end by such charming beauty," said Jules, heedless of the cheers from Brown, who was glad he had landed a live one and would not have to go scouting the water-front again.

"Cut that out, or I'll drop youse into the net mighty quick!" said Sadie, giving him the hard eye.

"If it is the fear of death you think I have, you will see me die gladly for a smile from your——"

"Aw, stow the gaff!" said Sadie. "I like youse, all right—you ain't so worse for a lime-juicer! But, say, don't git gay up here, or the boss'll take it out'n the pay—'n' I won't stand for that. What's your name?"

"The Count de Feu, my dear lady; and sink me, but I never went aloft with so fine a dame! I'm not married; I swear by the beard of—what you call him?—Davy Jones—that I'm as straight as a string and just as strong."

"Ah, g'wan! I heard 'em call you 'Jude,' or 'Jule,' or something like that. Tell me what you are—what ships you been in. Ever know Mr. Sullivan Magoon in the *Flying Scud*—used to be mate?"

"I'm French; honest, Sadie——"

"That'll do up there! Come below—git a move on, now!" said the voice of the boss, who had observed the performance with satisfaction. "I reckon he'll pull it off all right," he said, turning to Brown. "Better try him again a few times after dinner to make sure. I'll get Charley to git busy barking with a new yell about him. Looks like a good enough man, if he'll keep sober long enough to give Sadie a show."

"Here we are! The gallant Count de Feu—greatest man on earth—and the countess—the prettiest woman alive!" yelled Charley, the barker. "Come one, come all! If you never seen a man shot, here's the chance. If you've seen a man half shot—ha, ha! see the joke?—why, here he is, alive and well! Sails through space at the rate of a million miles a minute, fired out of a mighty engine of war—one of the same guns Dewey fired on and sunk the Spanish fleet out in Oskosh, in the Caribbean Sea!"

A large poster of a huge rifle belching forth death and destruction, and of a man hurtling through the flame and smoke toward the arms of the beautiful countess, was hung right behind Charley, and gave verisimilitude to the veracious narrative thus shouted forth.

Two sailormen crowded near. They gazed at the picture of the gallant count, and forthwith one of them went down into his trousers for the four nickels, which he deposited with Charley. Then they entered the sacred folds of the tent which hid the "mighty engine of war."

"Let's get around to the rear of this joint," said Sam. "I think about two good drinks will fix friend Brown all to the gazink. Keep that bag of powder out of sight, an' for hevings' sake don't let it catch fire from that stinkerino you're eating smoke out of. When I say the word, you change the bags, swap 'em quick, an' make a gitaway

with the real stuff, so's there ain't no come-back—see?"

"Well, Ay wouldn't do a fellow quite so dirt; but that's Sadie's fault. If she'd played fair wid me, Ay'd sure not blow the frog-eater up. But she's half crazy over the galoot," said Bill, the Sou'wegian. "Ay tank she bane in love wid Jules—played it hot wid Sullivan, skinned him clean. Here comes Mister Brown!"

"How do you do, Mister Brown. Don't you remember us?" said Sam.

"No. Cut it—go into the show 'n' sit down!" said the foreman.

"We're friends of Jules—you talked to us the day Jules came, remember. We want to see him do the stunt——"

"Oh, yes, now I remember! Well, what kin I do for youse?"

"Come take a drink, and show us the cannon what shoots Jules up."

Brown thought he would like a drink. He took several at Sam's expense, and Bill took great interest when they were showed the mighty engine of war which would shortly fire Jules skyward. The breech mechanism particularly interested them, and as privileged friends of the Count de Feu they were allowed to have a close look at it.

"Here is where they place the charge," said Brown. "Then they prime her; 'n' when she goes off you'd think she'd tear the devil out'n things, 'n' no mistake. But there's ways and ways to do things—which ain't in the programme for youse to know all about. Jules does the stunt fine——"

"But who is dat beautiful girl who is being h'isted away be th' gantline? Oh, my—my! Ay tank Jules would like her some," said Bill, seizing Brown by the arm and pointing to Sadie, who was just being sent aloft to her place on the trapeze.

The sudden turning of Brown's attention enabled the sullen Bill to place the charge within the chamber of the gun and secrete the small bag of powder, wood pulp, and other ingredients which made up the smoke, fire, and noise of the discharge.

"That's the countess, the partner in the act," said Brown. "She's all right. Here comes Jules, now. He's ready for the act—goin' on in five minutes. Go ahead 'n' sit in; maybe youse'll like to see it done right."

"Aw, we don't care fer nothin' dangerous like that. Ay tank we go back an' take one more drink. So-long, Mister Brown." And the two seamen made their way out.

Jules came into the little dressing room to put on his suit which would bespangle him into a resemblance of the Count de Feu. As he did so, a tall man bustled in and then stopped in amazement at the change that had taken place.

"What you doin' here?" asked the newcomer.

"Smoking, just at present, but I'm going out in a minute," said Jules. "What's eating of you? Why you ask me?"

"Are you the little gazabo what's takin' on my act? Are you the shrimp what's goin' with my wife?" asked the lean man.

"I'm the Count de Feu—sure! Fired through the air from the terrible engine of war——"

"Cut it, you lobster—make a gitaway before I fire you from an engine of peace! I'm Magoon—Sullivan Magoon—the real thing come back—see? An' I don't want any one takin' on my job. Where's Brown, or the boss?"

"Ah, you get drunk and beat up the lovely Sadie—your wife? I see. But I'm on, shipmate; you'll have to see the manager to get rid of me," said Jules.

"Oh, I'll fix you later—I'm going on, myself," said the prior Count de Feu.

A hurried but angry consultation followed between Brown and the now sober count.

"I tell you I've engaged this seaman, Jules—been on now for several days, ever since you got in the clink. You can't get the job back till the week's out—no, there's no use of gettin' ugly about it; you raised blazes with things when you had it, and we can't take no chances!" said Brown.

"Well, there ain't no other fellow takin' Sadie out—see? I'm either on or

the girl's off—don't make no mistake about it."

"We'll see what she has to say about it. You get boozed 'n' beat her up, get pinched, 'n' we lose the stunt—'n' now you come back talkin' about stoppin' the show! Nix—oh, no—you don't do any such trick! Not on your life. If you butt in I'll have you cinched again. Now, don't git gay!" And Brown went about his work, preparing for the show.

Jules came to him. "The guy come back—what? Do I go on, or do I go off? I won't go on unless you sign me for a month or three months—no less."

"I won't sign you anything!" snapped the exasperated Brown. "I'll see the boss 'n' get you fired, if you don't go on without no more fuss."

"Oh, very well, then," said Jules, and he proceeded to take off the gallant suit of pinks which the Count de Feu was wont to wear.

Sullivan Magoon came into the conversation. "I won't go on less'n you sign me for the summer, and I won't let Sadie do no stunts less'n I do, either—so what you going to do about it, hey?"

"You kin both go to the devil! I'll get somebody who'll take the job 'n' not half try," fumed the heated Brown. "Get out—both of youse."

Mr. Brown went to the outside, looking for the boss. The barker, Charley, was hard at it.

"Step lively, ladies; romp along in and see the greatest man on earth—or sky—fired from the same gun Dewey sunk the Spanish fleet at Curaçoa—yes, miss, the same gun! The same terrible engine of war that made a monkey of Admiral Celery—it's all for a dime, two nickels, a tenth part of a——"

Charley was a tough proposition. He was official bouncer, bad man, ticket seller, and barker all combined. and Brown went to him in his distress. The act must come off or the money be refunded, and Charley had done his share toward getting in the silver. Charley had taken the place of the Count de Feu on two or three occasions; but, because of his great weight and size, he was not exactly fitted for the position, albeit he was as strong as a bull and just as vicious when aroused. He had been a rough-and-tumble barroom fighter for some years, and was as hard as nails.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, as Brown came up.

"The devil to pay! Magoon is back, sober, 'n' won't let Sadie go on less'n he does. Jules won't go on as handy man—wants to be signed on for the summer, 'n' all that rot! What'll we do?"

"Aw, I'll take the shot if there's no one else, 'n' I'll take a try out of them there sailor fellers after," said Charley. "What you think—we give up all the tin fer two good-for-nothin' bums what's quarrelin' over a stunt a kid ought to be ashamed to do fer money? Nix on it, partner! Where's the boss?"

"The boss is off—gone up the street with the captain of police—got to square him to-day—pay-day to-morrow, you know. I reckon you'll do, all right, if you kin hold them folks down a few minutes. Go on in and dress—I'll hold the box office. Git a supe to fire for youse!"

Charley slid out of his perch and made his way quickly to the dressing room, where several pairs of tights were to be had, the property of the show. He pulled out his own white ones, in which he often used to pose as the Dying Gladiator; and in less time than it takes to tell he was arrayed for the terrible ordeal.

"Git out, you blamed molls!" growled Charley, as he passed the two aspirants for the title. "Sullivan, I'm going to square youse fer making so much trouble over Sadie."

Sadie was already waiting upon the flying-bar, wondering what was keeping the act back so long. She had gone through the giant swing, pulled herself up both with her powerful jaws and with either hand, and accomplished many other feats of dexterity. She now hung by the feet as Charley stepped into the arena and strode with majestic step toward the terrible engine of war which stood ready for him.

"Ladies and gents," said Charley, "I am the bravest man living to-day—that you will allow, after youse see what

I'm going to do. I will now let the gunner of the famous frigate *Chesapeake* fire me toward the heavens—to the Countess de Feu, who awaits her husband upon the flying-bar. Ladies, this is the identical rifle which sunk the *Merrimac* in the greatest battle of all history, procured at great cost and trouble by the managers of this refined show. I will show you what the Count de Feu can do, and you will realize what would have happened had I been at the battle, standing nobly behind—or, for that matter, in front—of the hostile guns of the arch-enemy of freedom. The eagle may scream, but the Count de Feu will sail——"

"Shut up an' git aboard!" said the voice of the boss, who had just come in to oversee the act, and was wondering at the delay.

Charley gave one magnificent sweep of his hand, a gesture developed by long practice; its grace and elegance was the envy of the unimaginative supe who stood at the lanyard of the engine of war. Then he slipped with great deliberation and care into the muzzle of the weapon which had destroyed the "enemies of his country."

There was a short silence.

"Fire!' said the boss.

With a crash like thunder, the terrible engine of war belched forth its contents. Fire and sparks flew wildly about, and smoke rose up in an immense cloud. The sawdust was blown bodily away from the muzzle, and the engine of war leaped wildly and furiously backward, running over the toes of the boss and of the supe, who were not quick enough to evade it.

Through the flaming burst of gas a form whirled end over end toward the top of the tent, emitting a hoarse scream which was barely audible through the echoes. Then Sadie, blinking, blinded, and amazed, made a frantic clutch and grabbed the leg of the flying Charley as he shot past her. The grip, although of iron strength, was not enough to stop the rifle shell which had sunk the navies of the enemy. It stopped the furious drive, however, and saved Charley's life; for he fell within the bounds of the net and lay still, stunned and burned, scorched and black with the blast of powder.

Instantly Sadie slid down to him, and carried him to the dressing room, while the audience gathered itself for the panic which ensued.

Then the boss ran for a doctor, Brown called the fire patrol, and the reserves of the police piled into the enclosure and dispersed the mob.

Charley looked up into the eyes of his countess. The lashes were burned from his lids; his eyebrows were close to his forehead; and his head was wiped as smooth as the palm of his hand. His tights were burning in places, but were quickly extinguished. They cleaned the powder black from him, and by the time the doctor came he was sitting up, with no bones broken, but with the fear of death strong upon him.

"You're all right; you're not hurt at all," said the doctor.

"Sure about that, doc?" stammered the victim.

"Yes, you're only shaken a bit, scorched a little; but you're all right, and sound as a trivet."

"Gimme a drink of whisky," said Charley.

He drank it down, and took another and another. Then he tried his legs and arms. They worked all right. He stood up.

"Gimme my hat an' coat, an' if I don't catch up with them gazabos before night you kin eat me fer a b'iled herrin'. Quick—let me out! I'm in a hurry, an' must move."

"Stop him!" ordered the boss. "Catch him!"

"Oh, let him go. It'll do Sullivan good to get up wid him," said Sadie. "It'll take some of the nerve out'n him after Charley gits through wid him—see?"

"But he never done it—sure not!" said Brown.

"Aw, let dem go! What's de use?" said Sadie. "Sully handed me one last week, an' I don't weep none over him after Charley gits through."

The Sun Victim

By Rene Mansfield

A story of aëronautics, concerning the dash for freedom and fortune made by Signor Sonnino in his air ship, and introducing a mysterious power which resolved matter into a little lump of gold

THE circus was in full swing. Gaping crowds thronged through the entrances and under the vast canvas, with an apparently insatiable desire for new sensations. The majority of them had been in the vicinity since noon, when Signor Sonnino made his daily ascent in "the marvel of the twentieth century—the wonder of the age"—a successful air ship of his own invention.

It was scheduled to descend shortly before the "Procession of All Nations," which opened the circus with sumptuous magnificence; but when the fanfare of trumpets announced the approach of the procession, the air ship was still a mere dark speck, to all appearances motionless, in the intense blue of the heavens.

At first, divided between the call of the spangled world beyond the ticket window and a desire to remain rooted to the spot until the descent of the air ship, the crowd lingered for a while. But upon being informed, through a megaphone, that Signor Sonnino's sojourn in the clouds, due probably to some breakdown in the machinery, was quite indefinite, the sensation seekers went into the big tent, where the three dazzling rings held their attention.

Behind the enormous curtains which shut off the dressing rooms, a scene of great confusion was taking place.

"It's that damned dago, I tell you!" yelled Daley, the manager. "I know it! I've had my eye on him for the last week—he's been acting kind of suspicious. But how in thunder he got that combination slip out of my clothes, beats me! And now he's got away with every sou—every cent gone, I tell you!"

"Bein' banker for the whole show with your little old safe always struck me as a bum idea, anyhow," put in the press agent. "Got enough to pay off with to-night?"

"Not a cent, I tell you—not a cent! The dago's got the whole haul—most of it in gold, too—up there in his infernal flying machine. He can drop down at some railroad station miles from here, and get away slick and clean. We're busted—done good and proper—that's all!"

"If we can keep him in sight and make out what station he heads for, we could telegraph and have him arrested when he drops."

"Good heavens, man! There aren't two telegraph stations in this whole infernal country. We could run the chance of Biggs making it in the red devil, though. Mighty slim chances, but we've got to do something."

"But how're we going to keep him in sight? He's pretty near lost now, and——"

"Say, look here!" interrupted Nelson, erstwhile aëronaut and balloonist who, since the advent of Sonnino a month before, had made only one ascension when the air ship had been out of order, and who was retained merely for such emergencies. "This morning, when the dago's propeller got to missing a few, I got the balloon all rigged and ready, and I can inflate her

in ten minutes. There's a mighty strong wind from the southwest which he can't afford to head into with a propeller on the bum, and it ought to carry me right after him——"

"Fifty dollars if you do it, Nelson!" cried Daley, pushing him excitedly toward a curtained opening. "By George, a hundred! Keep him in sight if you have to hitch your balloon to the sun, moon, and stars!"

In less than fifteen minutes, the great balloon was rounded out and rising rapidly, carried by the strong southwest wind directly toward the apparently motionless air ship.

Swiftly the balloon gained now on the inert machine, which seemed to be only slightly affected by the wind. Nelson noted the frantic movements of the Italian as the latter worked over the propeller. The man had doubtless noticed the approach of the balloon, and was redoubling his efforts to escape. Nelson could see the machine move slowly for a while and then stop suddenly.

Finally, when Nelson was almost within hailing distance, the air ship seemed suddenly to receive a mighty impetus, and shot forward like an arrow. At times completely hidden by masses of summer clouds, it darted through the sky so swiftly that for a while Nelson feared he might not be able to keep it in sight. But, as suddenly as it had darted into the east, it stopped, seeming to palpitate like a bird shot in its flight. Once more the balloon gained on the air ship; nearer than before was the great silk ball borne by the wind—so near that Nelson could catch the faint pounding of the machinery—so near, at last, that he could almost hear the curses and imprecations of the stooping Italian.

Suddenly Sonnino leaped to his feet, and a bullet whizzed through the ropes that held the basket of the balloon, narrowly missing Nelson's ear. Almost before the shot rang out, Nelson, divining the man's intention, had instinctively crouched low in the basket, his arms above his head.

The Italian peered wildly across the intervening space, and seeing the limp form in the bottom of the basket, was evidently satisfied that his shot had been true.

The palpitations of the machine, scarcely perceptible at first, had now become spasmodic convulsions. Nelson could see Sonnino, with blanched face, thrown violently from side to side. After a few desperate struggles with a long, dark object which seemed to be attached to the side of the machine, the Italian started to climb over the side of the car. In a moment his intention flashed upon Nelson. He was about to descend from the awful height of fully twenty-five thousand feet, with the parachute which he had never before been forced to use, leaving his precious machine to explode in the heavens—a catastrophe that seemed momentarily imminent!

Almost before the Italian's parachute was fully spread, Nelson, in his element immediately, was dropping swiftly from the balloon. Down he dropped, until the rush of the air in his ears abated as the parachute checked his descent through the clouds. He began to float gently earthward.

There came to his ears a report like a short, sharp peal of distant thunder. Fragments of iron and wood commenced to fall about him.

Clearly, the Italian had gauged the time well. A few moments longer in the machine, and he would have been hurled into an eternity of space.

"Free! free!" Sonnino was whispering ecstatically. "The beautiful gold pieces in my pocket, the universe to escape in, and Italy—Italy across the sea! Ah, my great bird, my tamed eagle, we fly forever from this country miserable! A week, a month—and the fragrant winds, the song of the nightingale—Bianca, Bianca! What matters then a little theft, a tiny peccadillo? To live again!"

Now working over the refractory propeller, now confident at the rudder, now gazing long at the bag of shining gold pieces, Sonnino for a time did not

notice the pursuing balloon; but, from the moment when he realized that Nelson's intention was literally to track him to earth if possible, he determined to hurl himself into the immensity of space rather than to be thwarted in this bold stroke. He implored the saints, and at times the machine shot ahead as though in response to his prayers; he cursed the perversity of fate when the throbbing of the engine slackened, then ceased altogether, then sounded again threateningly.

When at last he knew that it was only a matter of a few moments at most before this aërial creature of his brain, the work of his hands, should crash into fragments, he hesitated not a minute in what he had planned to attempt.

Unaccustomed as he was to the use of the parachute, Sonnino experienced during the first thousand feet of descent sensations of agonizing strangeness. It seemed to him, after a while, that he must have been falling for centuries.

"*Madonna!*" he breathed, "it is a thousand years of Inferno! But presently in the orange grove—my Bianca! I hear the nightingale, the washing of the sea; the scented fingers of the breeze lift the dark strands of Bianca's hair. But no—I am falling, always falling! Ah, at last the earth is spreading out wide arms to clutch me! A subtle warmth seems to enclose me. The heat suffuses me like wine; it penetrates to my marrow; it is creeping into my soul! *Madonna!* I am descending into purgatory! Fiery tongues leap toward me—a thousand flaming arms reach out for me, touch me! I shrivel—ah!—I burn! I burn!"

After what seemed hours of dizzy descent, with the blood pounding in his ears and blurring his eyes, Nelson caught dim glimpses of something solid beneath him—caught a sense of spreading land—caught finally the outline of some dark object, and found himself at last dropping easily upon a vast prairie. There was nothing to be seen for miles around save a rudely constructed, tumble-down little shack, behind which an unusually high board fence surrounded a square area of several acres.

It seemed to Nelson that Sonnino must have reached the earth somewhere on the other side of this fence. Though dazed and weak from his long descent, he ran as swiftly as his numbed legs would carry him toward the enclosure, hoping to find the Italian entirely exhausted by his unaccustomed performance, but fearing that he might have slipped through his fingers, after all.

As he neared the little cabin, an amazed-looking individual appeared in the doorway, peering over his spectacles into Nelson's bloodshot eyes and haggard face.

"Robber—thief!" gasped Nelson. "Other side of fence!"

The spectacled individual stared at his retreating form for an instant, then set off at an awkward gait in the direction opposite to that taken by Nelson. Arriving at the other side of the square, he discovered Nelson prostrate on the burning sands, turning his head painfully to gaze in every direction across the arid prairie which stretched on every side, devoid of vegetation or dwelling.

There was absolutely no trace of a human being, as far as the eye could reach. It was as though the Italian and his parachute had evaporated in the torrid air. Nelson remembered having seen Sonnino's descending figure when he himself was less than a hundred yards from the ground. Even allowing for the few minutes the Italian had gained by being the first to reach the earth, it would scarcely have been possible for him to efface himself so suddenly, so entirely.

One solution of the puzzle remained. Nelson laid it to his dazed and exhausted state that he had not thought of this before. Sonnino had, of course, alighted within the high fence around the enclosure; and as there seemed to be but the one opening in it, directly behind the cabin, he was doubtless at that very moment effecting an escape.

As he arose unsteadily to his feet,

Nelson tried to explain the situation, in disjointed sentences, to the man with the spectacles, who stood transfixed, having no doubt whatever of Nelson's insanity. Knowing, however, that one should always humor the mad, he assisted the balloonist toward the cabin, assuring him that the enclosure should be searched, and that there was no possible chance for any one to have been inside it without being seen.

In response to Nelson's inquiries as to the reason for the careful fencing in of an isolated spot in the barren prairie, he explained that a party of scientists, of whom he was one, were carrying on an experiment which they wished to preserve a secret for the present. For this reason, when they reached the cabin, Nelson remained outside the high fence, while the scientist made a perfunctory search within, to satisfy the aëronaut's insane whim. He returned almost immediately, saying that there was no evidence of the Italian and his parachute having been within a hundred miles of the place.

There remained nothing for Nelson to do but to acknowledge defeat and return by some means or other to the circus. He learned that there was a railway station within three miles; and after resting a few minutes in the cabin, where three other scientists were working over charts and diagrams—they scarcely looked up as he repeated his strange tale—he set out, late in the afternoon, to walk the weary distance.

He had a fleeting idea that the Italian's parachute might have been borne by the wind in the direction of the station, but a glance at the sky disposed of the fantastic notion. Sonnino, apparently, was neither upon the earth nor in the air.

Thus arguing with himself, Nelson arrived at the station, which was a mere shanty, in charge of an old man whose duty it was to flag the through trains in the unusual event of a passenger. Nelson soon elicited the information that there was but one train a day, and that the man had not seen a living soul for three days. Despondently the balloonist took the next train, and returned to report to the much-incensed manager.

The next afternoon, Daley showed him the following letter which he had received:

D. T. Daley, M'g'r. Daley Bros.' Circus.

Dear Sir: Yesterday afternoon, the 17th inst., a man claiming to be in your employ appeared near our plant and said he had descended from a balloon, and was in pursuit of an Italian who had likewise descended by parachute from an air ship. Convinced that the man was insane, we paid no attention to his fantastic tale, further than to satisfy him by a cursory search of our grounds.

To make clear our connection with the disappearance of the Italian, it will be necessary to explain slightly the nature of our present undertaking, which, however, we wish kept from public notice for the present.

As scientists, we are endeavoring to ascertain the law of the specific power of the sun's rays. To this end we have constructed a solar motor whose mechanism we will attempt to explain briefly, for reasons which will shortly appear. The essential part of the motor is a great glass reflector, circular in shape, and resembling an umbrella with its top cut off, having, roughly, a diameter of sixty feet at the outer edge and thirty at the inner opening. The inner surface is lined with more than four thousand small mirrors which reflect the rays of the sun upon a boiler at the centre, corresponding to the handle of the umbrella. This boiler operates a centrifugal pump.

Not having seen a machine of this description in operation, you can have no possible conception of the tremendous force at work. Any object coming within the focus of this scorching circle is instantly consumed. Wood becomes a flame, metals a molten mass. Should a man, by some unhappy chance, come within the death-dealing radius, he would be burned to a crisp in a moment.

Having occasion last night to overhaul the machinery, we found, near the centre of the disk, a small lump of molten gold, for whose presence we can account in but one way—a way which you have by this time doubtless surmised. Ghastly as the supposition is, we feel convinced that the Italian and his parachute were drawn into this concentrated circle of intense heat and immediately consumed, only the stolen gold remaining to testify to his horrible death.

We deplore exceedingly this unfortunate catastrophe, which could have occurred only through a most unusual, almost phenomenal set of circumstances.

We hold the mass of gold subject to advice.

Yours truly,

Heffelfinger Scientific Research Society.

Per L. T. Davis.

A Chat With You

WE want you to make the acquaintance of Mr. Edgar Beecher Bronson. If you have already read his "Reminiscences of a Ranchman," you know that he is some one worth meeting. When you read his stories in coming numbers of THE POPULAR, the fact will be borne in upon you all the more strongly. Mr. Bronson, besides having the trained ability and imagination of a writer, has an unusual equipment in the way of experience. He is the kind of man found more often in America than in any other part of the world. More than a score of years ago he was one of the staff of the New York *Tribune*, which was a bigger force in those days than it is now. His health broke down, and he went West, at the age of twenty, to recuperate. That was when things were really happening in the West. That was when things began to happen to Bronson.

THOSE were the days when there were real live Indians on the warpath, when there were no barbed-wire fences on the ranches, when cowboys had to be gun fighters as well as riders, and when cattle rustlers of the deadly variety were an unpleasant fact rather than a romantic tradition. There are grizzled, retired officers to be met with in clubs who can still tell you about those days. None can tell of them so well, however, as does Mr. Bronson, who was a part of the West in the days of its first wonderful growth and change, who played his own part in the deadly and practically silent struggle which ended with the disappearance and almost total extinction of one of the most interesting peoples that we have ever heard of—the American Indian.

WHEN Bronson got off the train at Cheyenne, Wyoming, he was a real tenderfoot, a youngster determined to be a cowboy. He had a letter of introduction to N. R. Davis—at that time the owner of the finest horse ranch in all Wyoming—an outfit that turned out to be entirely useless, and a good stock of pluck and determination. He became a cowboy, and afterward a ranch owner, in partnership with Abram Hewitt; and all those years before he left the West were brimming with color and incident. Bronson has just returned from an elephant and lion hunt in the country in which ex-President Roosevelt is now shooting. Besides all this, Bronson was for a long time a prominent member of the Aëro Club, and the holder of records for aërial flights. You see that he is distinctly a man of action. In coming numbers of THE POPULAR you will find out what a good story he can tell. His characters and incidents are all taken from life, and that life of the most adventurous and strangest. We felt that, if you knew about him, you would want him to write for you. He has done so, and you will read a series of his stories in coming issues.

OF course you have heard a great deal about the Panama Canal. Unless you have set your imagination to work on the subject, you can scarcely realize what the work done there means.

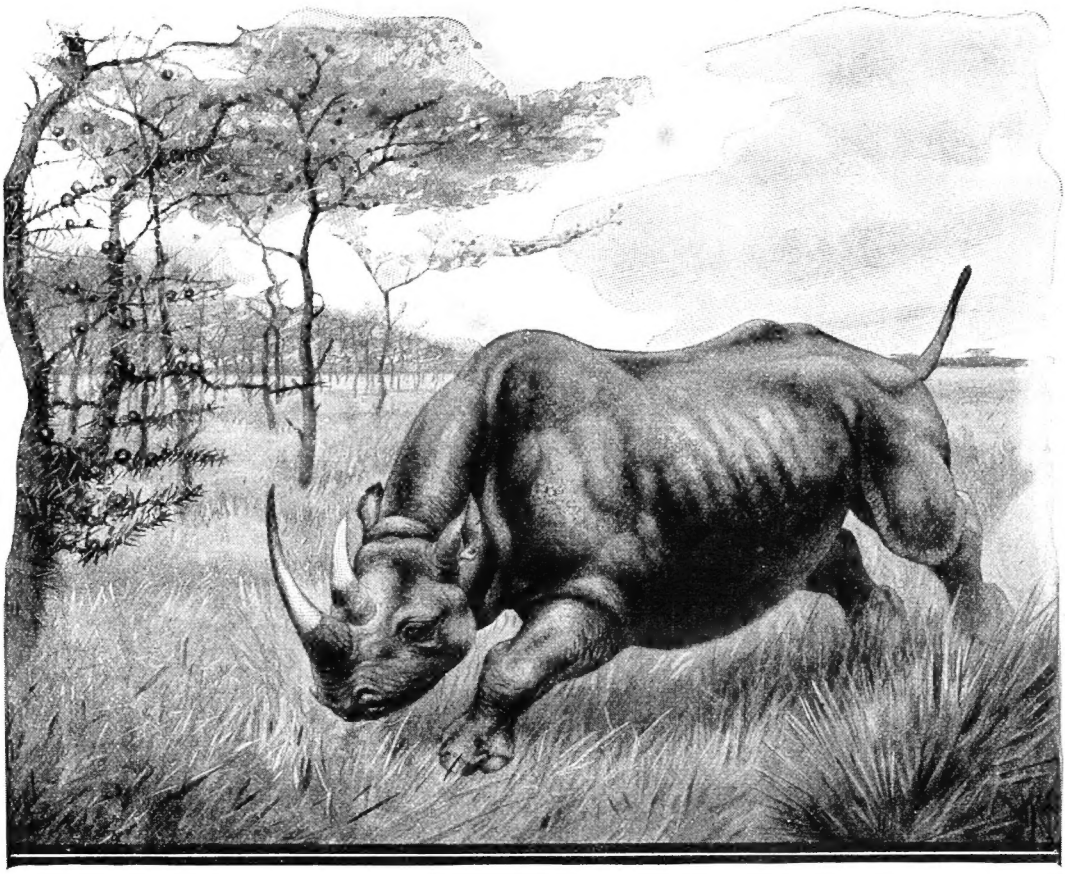
It means, for one thing, that a little chunk of America—young college men and pretty girls, Y. M. C. A.'s and American-plan hotels, engineers, doctors, nurses, and hotelkeepers — has been planted by the beneficent U. S. A. right in the thick of the Central American jungle. It means a small world where life and ambition are very keen and intense, where the races and the ideals meet and struggle, the Latin and the Teutonic, the northern and the tropical. It means unequaled opportunities for loot and dishonesty, as well as for honor and integrity. It is one of the dramatic pictures in world history, and it is passing before us like the shifting films in the cinematograph.

FRANCIS LYNDE, who wrote "The King of Arcadia," "The City of Numbered Days," and "My Lord of the Pillagers," set out to make a part of this picture permanent in the form of a novel for THE POPULAR. He succeeded, we think; and incidentally he has told one of the best stories of the kind we have read in a long time. Francis Lynde knows a good deal about engineering feats and the sort of men who are engaged in them. His Panama novel, "A Gentleman Adventurer," will appear complete in the September number of THE POPULAR. It recounts the story of a daring raid upon public funds by a Wall Street manipulator. Some of the scenes—all of which are sufficiently stirring to make the blood tingle—are laid aboard the steam yacht of the manipulator; some of them are laid on the Isthmus itself. If you want to read a rousing story that will make you forget everything but the fact that you are enjoying yourself thoroughly, get hold of THE POPULAR on the tenth of next month, and start to read "A Gentleman Adventurer" right away. You may forget to get off the train when it comes to your station, but you won't forget to finish the story.

DID you ever hear of R. F. Foster? If you are a card player—we mean a scientific one, not a frequenter of euchres—you probably have. He is well kown everywhere as an expert authority on whist, and, although this seems to be saying a great deal, there is scarcely any one in the country who knows as much about the great American game, poker. This fact should make doubly interesting his story, "Half the Nine of Hearts," which appears in the September POPULAR. Above and beyond this—and a great deal more important, from our point of view—is the fact that it is a splendid short story. Whether you know the ace of clubs from the ten of diamonds or not, you will be interested in it; and we can conscientiously advise you to read it.

THERE is another unusually strong short story in the September number. It is "Man-with-the-Burned-Face," by Bertrand W. Sinclair. We don't know which are better, his novels or his short stories. Which do you think? The story which you will read next month is one of the best he has written. It is an Indian story, as you may have guessed from the name. We hope that you will enjoy reading it as much as we have.

IF you had just discovered something you had been hunting for a long time—something surprisingly good—would you not have a little difficulty in keeping the good news from your friends when you were talking to them? We find ourselves in that embarrassing position. We have one or two announcements we have planned to make next month—one or two splendid things we have in store for you—which we cannot talk about now. It's very hard to keep things to oneself, especially among friends, but—*look out for next month's* POPULAR!



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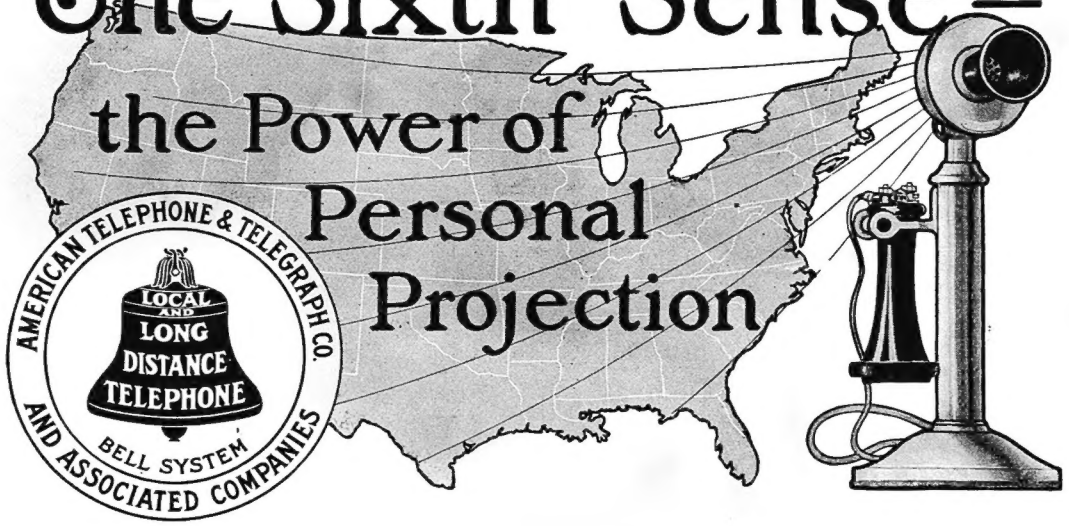
Also in twenty-five cent tins.

NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY

Tell the substitutor: "No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye."

The Sixth Sense—the Power of Personal Projection



An American's sense of projecting himself far beyond the skies and hills of his forefathers is largely responsible for his self-assurance—for his mental vigor and the progress which this has meant.

This Sixth Sense—the sense of projection—is due to the telephone. It is due to the *Bell telephone system* which at any instant conveys *his personality,* if not his person, to any part of the country. It carries his voice with *directness* to the ear of the person wanted. Carries it with its *tone qualities* and *inflections*—things which are *vital* to the expression of personality.

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You are virtually in two places at once.

Though this service is in a class by itself, the Bell telephone has no fight with the other public utilities. Its usefulness is dove-tailed into *all other utilities.* Each of the others is unquestionably made more effective by the Bell telephone.

A telegram is delivered from receiving office to house by *telephone.* The more people telegraph, the more they *telephone.* The more people travel, the more they *telephone.* The more energetically a man pursues business of *any* kind, the more he needs and uses the *telephone.*

The universal Bell telephone gives every other utility an added usefulness. It provides the Nation with its Sixth Sense.

A business man has one important arm of his business paralyzed if he does not have a Long Distance Telephone at his elbow. It extends his personality to its fullest limitations—applies the multiplication table to his business possibilities. It keeps things moving.

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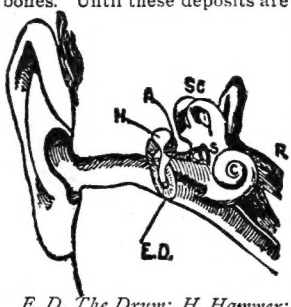

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